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CORRESPONDENCE

Aristide & history

Petionville, Haiti

To the Editors: John Hogan's review of Jean-Bertrande Aristide's *In the Parish of the Poor* [June 14] dealt more with recent Haitian history and with prescriptions for the country's future than with the writings themselves. Many will disagree with his statement that "Aristide has surrounded himself with strong and capable cabinet members." A former baker as prime minister? And the others no more qualified.

The verdict is in on Père Aristide. It is still very much out on President Aristide.

LYNN V. MARSHALL

Haiti as omen

Providence, R.I.

To the Editors: Having lived and worked in Haiti during a turbulent time, December 1986 to July 1988, I'd like to lend my support to the John P. Hogan review of *In the Parish of the Poor*, by Jean-Bertrande Aristide [June 14]. I too believe Amy Wilentz captures the climate of the time and offers an honest introduction to "Pe Titid." All concerned about the development of nations (and of an appropriate theology) should read the book.

Whatever happens in Haiti, nothing can diminish the fantastic journey its people have traveled thus far. Their struggle may or may not offer a model for other nations, but it ought to be an omen for the "cold country to the north," and be received as "a voice of one calling in the desert."

GUY A. AZZA

Harsh toward Israel

San Luis Obispo, Calif.

To the Editors: As a longtime grateful reader of *Commonweal*, it is rare for me to take strong exception to what I read in its pages. But your recent pronouncements on Israel strike me as unusually harsh and most disturbing.

It costs nothing for your editors to hurl Jovian thunderbolts against Israel for the intransigence of its leaders. What do you risk? A few subscriptions? But the snakepit of Mideast politics is no ballgame. If Israel should fail to repel the next attack of its neighbors, or the next one after that, Israel will be no more.

The disclosure of April Glaspie's lies to Congress underscores the fact that the secretary of state whose remarks about Israel you quote so approvingly was so incautious about Saddam as to encourage his invasion of Kuwait. Yet Israel's next-door neighbor, Hafez Assad, as ruthless as Saddam, but more cunning and more powerful, completed his conquest of Lebanon on Israel's borders while the world was watching Baghdad. His is now the world's fourth largest army, recently reinforced by high-tech offensive Western weaponry, clearly an extraordinary threat to Israel's very existence.

After a war that revealed Israel's vulnerability as never before, in a period in which ancient anti-Semitic poisons have surfaced more than at any time since Hitler, when Israel is struggling valiantly to absorb hundreds of thousands of victims of anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, it would behoove American liberals not to be quite so quick to offer hostile advice to the Israelis.

QUENTIN OGREN

'Ad hominem' attack

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: One can agree with the editors of *Commonweal* with regard to the substance of the debate over Israel's current settlement policies, while at the same time also understanding Judith Banki's concern as a Jew over *Commonweal*'s "elliptical" attack on members of Congress who might express a different viewpoint [editorial, June 14; Correspondence, July 12]. Surely, *Commonweal* as a Catholic journal can see the sensitivities involved in the implication that "American supporters of Israel" have virtually bought members of the U.S. Congress so effectively that they have become "blind...to U.S. interests." Such language plays, however unintentionally, both on the dual loyalty charge against American Jews and only slightly more subtly on medieval Jewish money lender and nineteenth-century Jewish conspiracy charges.

It would seem to me that the case against the Israeli settlements policy is strong enough to stand on its own merits. It does not need to be bolstered with a gratuitous *argumentum ad hominem.*

EUGENE J. FISHER

The writer is on the staff of the Catholic-Jewish relations section of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Leaving the flock

Hempstead, N.Y.

To the Editors: I had three reactions to Thomas McCabe's article, "A Married Priest: What Changed, What Remained" [July 12]. The first was to wonder whether he had considered that the various virtues the church celebrates usually appear to lie dormant until needed. Faith seems little needed until one is assailed by doubts. A self-satisfied bachelor priest has little need of the virtue of chastity. The article left me asking myself whether Mr. McCabe gave up on celibacy just when it might have

(Continued on page 525)

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COMMONWEAL

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Condom sense

"You can play with them," reads a New York subway ad picturing teen-agers gleefully playing volleyball with an inflated condom. "Don't play around without them. Use a condom," it clinches its point. The clever word play delivers a message about preventing AIDS, but not the one that New York teen-agers need to hear. Instead, the merry punsters at New York City's Health Department seem to encourage premature—and possibly lethal—sexual activity among the young while disinviting serious thinking about the dangers AIDS actually presents. The Health Department is not alone.

This past winter New York Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez pushed a condom distribution plan through the school board with the help of Mayor David Dinkins as part of a utilitarian approach to combating the spread of AIDS among sexually active adolescents. To insure the program's effectiveness, neither parental consent nor notification will be required. According to the experts, parents only scare students away. Nor will the schools require counseling as part of its condom-distribution program. Presumably that too might scare students away. Condom's will be available in New York City high schools later this fall. (As we go to press, it appears likely that Mr. Fernandez will reluctantly accede to a parental "opt-out" option being incorporated into the condom program.)

As the subway poster and the school board's decision demonstrate, something vital has been lost in the city's approach. That vital something is morality, and "moral" questions about sexual behavior. This is a policy that de-ethicizes sexual behavior precisely where sexual responsibility is most needed. What, after all, is the likely result of trying to modify sexual behavior without reference to concepts of moral responsibility? Volleyball seems to be the answer.

It's hard to believe the chancellor and his advisors have asked themselves how dispensing condoms along with textbooks can possibly shape the most intimate of human relations. Would they expect students to make themselves accountable if similar minimal expectations were applied to school work? Or to obtaining a driver's license? Could a high school field a sports team if students were simply issued uniforms and told to play the games as they saw fit? It is as if Mr. Fernandez reasons that survival during a drought depended on providing each individual with his or her own well-digging equipment. Survival in such desperate circumstances depends on more compelling forms of cooperation. Thus excluding parents from the school condom program has to be among the most self-defeating aspects of the policy. And there are others.

Mr. Fernandez argues that counseling or guidance is unnecessary: "People at any age have ready access to condoms at supermarkets and drugstores without the benefit of an educational or counseling component." (Let us leave aside the questions about why contraceptive services are being added to an overburdened school system

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if condoms are so readily available—as they are, and often for free.) More important, if someone is too thoughtless to buy condoms at a drugstore, what chance is there that he will bother to obtain a condom at school? Or that he or she would have the resolve to actually use a condom at the crucial moment? Indeed, the logic of Mr. Fernandez's argument suggests that the more responsible plan would have been to introduce supervised sex into the school system. If the children are going to have sex whether we think it proper or not, shouldn't we provide as safe an environment as possible? The city's unwillingness to go that far (we hope) demonstrates how the seemingly straightforward logic of the chancellor's argument conceals, rather than illuminates, the social and moral questions at stake.

The condom policy implicitly reduces sexual relations to a mechanical and nearly uncontrollable biological urge. It is this absence of a sense of human dignity—something adolescents, especially those who are poor, feel intensely in a society that already marginalizes them in countless ways—that lies at the root of this moral and sexual agnosticism. In an effort to make condom distribution matter-of-fact and therefore palatable, proponents present its case in a way that empties sex of meaning and moral consequence. Condoms and sexual information of all kinds are easily available, yet the tragic consequences of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, of teen-age childbearing, and of sexual crime are increasingly with us, suggesting that sexual behavior is not so amenable to "common sense" solutions and rationalized expectations as those with a penchant for social engineering would have us believe.

But the problem goes still deeper. The condom plan's illusory practicality is symptomatic; a policy that medicalizes the social and moral question of adolescent sex is a way of avoiding more troubling realities. For example, it encourages us to continue to ignore the poverty and family breakdown that lie at the heart of destructive sexual behavior among many adolescents. AIDS is increasingly a disease of the urban poor, especially intravenous drug users and their sexual partners. Preventing the spread of AIDS among these adolescents is a question of influencing complex behavior and of understanding human motivation and the wellsprings of moral accountability. In subordinating sexual morality to the technology of contraception, the condom-distribution plan naively hopes to address human sexual life with the cause-and-effect logic of a vaccination procedure. Sex doesn't work that way. Indeed, in this context, the medicalization of sexual life dehumanizes it by removing it from the context of family life and the necessary ballast afforded the young by tradition and community values.

Protecting and promoting, rather than undermining, the authority of the family is essential in fostering the kind of moral responsibility that will keep young people alive in these circumstances. Adolescent sexual behavior is not a blind force of nature. It is shaped and driven by many different cultural values—and at this time many of them are frankly exploitative. The school board's condom plan subtly absolves children of moral responsibility exactly where it should insist upon it. It establishes a premature adolescent autonomy and choice without examining what is being chosen. Self-reliance and self-discipline are essential qualities of maturity. Giving condoms to teen-agers because we have despaired of influencing their sexual decision making announces the board's enormous failure of moral and psychological imagination and tragically undermines the dignity of those it hopes to protect. Adolescents desperately want more, not less, expected of them.

LIBRARIANS AND INDEXERS TAKE NOTE: Starting with the issue of January 17, 1992, *Commonweal* will break with its own practice and commence numbering each separate issue at "Page 1." Thereafter our annual index (published in the final issue of each calendar year), will list all articles, editorials, and reviews with issue dates as well as page numbers. We hope this change will assist readers, researchers, and librarians alike.

IT AIN'T OVER...

THE SOVIET COUP

...'TIL IT'S OVER

In the middle of the failed coup in the Soviet Union on August 19, two remarkable occurrences took place, amid a myriad of other amazing events. The Central Committee of the once omnipotent Communist party of the Soviet Union attempted to hold a meeting. It could not, because there were not enough members present to form a quorum. A complete vacuum of power existed at the apex of the party's structure.

Meanwhile, in another part of Moscow, the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko examined his conscience. He had been a longtime adversary of conservative chauvinism, as he had shown by his denunciation of anti-Semitism in his famous poem "Babi Yar." Consequently Yevtushenko had reservations, about Boris Yeltsin's populist use of traditional Russian nationalism to rally support from many categories of people. But the poet put aside his doubts on August 19. He went to the besieged building of the Russian Parliament. As Yevtushenko later told PBS, he walked through the eerily empty corridors of the huge edifice, occupied, it seemed, by only about fifty armed men. Finally, he found Yeltsin who firmly shook his hand and greeted the poet with a wink of the eye. That night, on the back of a Yeltsin decree that named the coup leaders as criminals, Yevtushenko wrote a poem. On August 20, he read the text from the Parliament's balcony to more than 50,000 Moscovites. Out of the uncertainty, and the void left by a crumbling Communist party, came an unmistakable Russian message: "Today we are a nation/ No longer fools, happy to be fooled...."

The words conveyed the passionate intensity of the enormous wave of nationalism now sweeping through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. They spoke of jubilant enthusiasm, yet the pride in the poem was tinged by disillusion. And the hope

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expressed by Yevtushenko was—is—immense, almost superhuman: Do not be deceived. Even at a brief temporal distance from the events of August, don't these words raise a more ominous concern: What forces would be unleashed should this great expectation of the future be disappointed? At the very moment that Yevtushenko voiced his joy, far away in Yugoslavia, Serbs and Croats were killing each other in a meaningless and fratricidal conflict.

In fact, the momentous changes of this past summer really began in July when civil war broke out in Yugoslavia. The now disgraced hard-liners in Moscow, as well as policy makers in Western Europe and Washington, all watched the Yugoslavian crisis with anxiety because its agony represented, in miniature, exactly what they feared might happen in the Soviet Union. Like Yugoslavia, the U.S.S.R. was a federal state made up of a complex patchwork of ethnic groups. Similarly, in both countries the waning of communism was giving birth to mighty centrifugal forces. In contrast with the Soviet Union, however, Yugoslavia had long ago attempted to build a decentralized political structure to accommodate stress between the central government and constituent republics. For the Moscow conservatives who plotted their abortive putsch, the Soviet Union was about to follow Yugoslavia into chaos once radical devolution of the U.S.S.R. began with the signing of the new union treaty on August 20, 1991. Hence their clumsy haste to act the day before, rather than waiting for the difficult winter that was sure to come. Ironically, by making this choice, the coup planners only hastened the very changes they sought to avoid.

There was an air of grave fatality to August 19, as if not just the Soviet Union, but the whole world was being swept along by a tide of Tolstoyan proportions. Jacek Kuron was prophetic writing four years ago in Warsaw: "A genie is being let out of the bottle. Gorbachev has set the social forces in motion, and neither he nor anyone else knows what the consequences will be." Already, one fact is certain. The decade of the '90s will be a time when the boundaries of a number of existing countries will be redrawn. If there are historical analogies, they are with those eras of great transition, such as the period around World War I when the Austro-Hungarian empire fell apart. Furthermore it is most likely that this transformation extends far beyond communist countries, since roughly half of the world's current federations now experience some kind of ethnic conflict.

How can one make sense of the swirl of events? Suppose we make the assumption, as many observers already have, that we are now living through the birth pangs of the "global age"? Then it does seem to be reasonably clear that among the causes of the present upheaval, there are four interrelated factors of change that are most important:

1. The decay of communism as a unifying belief;
2. The resurgence of ethnic and religious nationalism;
3. A general crisis of federalism;
4. The weakening of established state structures through economic globalization and the communications revolution.

What is extraordinary about the Soviet Union—and at the same time most hopeful and dangerous—is that the reform faction that came to power in 1985 consciously set out to meet the challenge of globalization. The reformers were led, of course, by Mikhail Gorbachev, but also by a very powerful figure in the bureaucracy of the Communist party, Aleksandr N. Yakovlev. Their real program was to create an open society to meet the challenges of an open world. The reform faction had some allies in the intelligence community and military-industrial complex, experts who saw economic stagnation leaving the U.S.S.R. hopelessly wedged between an emerging Germany and Japan. Yakovlev was the real strategist among the reformers, and throughout the last six years of political change, his shifts have always given signs about Gorbachev's real intentions. It was Yakovlev who, on August 16, quit the Communist party, warning of a state coup. To all who wished change in the Soviet Union, of whatever kind, this was an absolute signal that they should think about what they would do in the days ahead.

Obviously, it is clear now that the reformers of 1985 did not envisage the sheer scale of the transition which they began, even though they purposefully initiated a "revolution from above." They certainly underestimated the power of ethnic nationalism in a democratized Soviet Union. Here, too, Yakovlev's career supplies clues about how very deep the cleavage has been between conservatives and reformers in Soviet society for more than a generation. For ten years, from 1962-72, Yakovlev worked in the propaganda department of the Soviet Communist party's Central Committee, the very body which appeared to evaporate in the middle of the August 19 coup. Then, in 1972, he published an all-important article in the magazine *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, apparently about the writing of history, but actually warning that a group of right-wing Russian nationalists and slavophiles—perhaps even fascists—existed within the Communist party. Leonid Brezhnev immediately decided that Yakovlev had to leave the Soviet Union, and sent him as the country's ambassador to Canada, where Yakovlev remained until the reform faction came to power in 1985. Then the new leadership set out on a path diametrically opposed to the Right within the party, seeking radical adjustment to what Gorbachev called "an interrelated and interdependent world."

Now, as the winter of 1991 approaches, the battle between various kinds of Right and Left is out in the open, no longer confined to the precincts of a single party. And the Soviet Union, as well as independent republics, faces the simultaneous interplay of the factors of upheaval: the dissolution of communism, nationalism, disintegration of the federation and attempts at confederation, added to the economic crisis accentuated by structural reform. In 1991, it is estimated that the Soviet GNP will have fallen by nearly 20 percent, inflation will continue at a rate of 100 percent or more, and the grain harvest will be inadequate.

In these circumstances, the crucial question is what form the triumphant nationalism will take. Will it be like the citizen-democrat nationalism of the French and American Revolutions, reposing on human rights and the sovereignty of the people acting freely from below? Or will it follow the pattern of the late nineteenth century: an "organic," racist nationalism of the kind that led to Hitler, feeding on myths of blood and an irrational division of the world into a hostile enmity of "us" and "them"?

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It is almost certain that this tension of belief exists within every individual. Within Yevtushenko, always the enemy of chauvinism, trusting that the new Russian nationalism will be of the citizen-democrat variety, rising in his words like a "swan," and not sinking down into the mud. Within the farmers and workers, justifiably angry about the injustice of economic reform, but mindful that they must face a choice between a flawed democracy and a no more reliable strong man. The split must exist, too, within Yeltsin himself, and his government, which made an enormous blunder on August 26, when it warned secessionists that the Russian Republic might consider redrawing boundaries along ethnic lines. Just such a plan of bargaining by force has been carried out in Yugoslavia by right-wing and Communist Serbs, with bloody consequences, and all in the name of a "Greater Serbia."

Some of the most historically minded of American observers, such as Professor Gerry Hough of Duke University, warn that the August 19 revolution was probably the first stage in a more drawn-out process. The comparison, in Russian history, is with the Kerensky government born out of the revolution of February 1917.

The failed putsch of August 19, 1991, offers a number of signals, both hopeful and dark, that much is left to come. Many journalists have described the coup as a "Woody Allen" affair, or an "operetta." Quite the contrary, it is a coup that was never executed. The overwhelming majority of the Soviet Army did not participate, a fact made obvious when U.S. intelligence sources said American satellites had detected no significant troop maneuvers around Moscow. As soon as the putsch failed, British intelligence indicated that they believed Boris Yeltsin's recent campaign to woo members of the Soviet military by appealing to their "Russian" tradition had succeeded, and that well-placed officers had protected him in the past. Furthermore, for months, the Russian KGB and the Soviet KGB had been working almost desk-to-desk in the same building (shortage of office space), so there was plenty of opportunity for like-minded bureaucrats to confer. Yakovlev, on August 16, had sent an unequivocal message to reformers, wherever they were in the Soviet Union. And Mikhail Gorbachev, in a number of subsequent public statements, has indicated that he knew the coup was coming.

The ambiguous nature of the coup gives reasons for both despair and hope as the Soviet Union faces its long, hard winter. So, too, does the fact that the Soviet armed forces, especially at the level of the middle ranks, were the main absent parties to the putsch and are still to be heard from.

The reason for pessimism is the well-known presence in the armed forces of officers who would like to see a "Chilean solution" to the economic problems of Russia and the Union: which is to say, a market economy imposed from above by a military dictatorship. Unfortunately, some of Boris Yeltsin's economic advisors have used language suggesting a similar view. The economist Nikolai Shmelyov, for one, has publicly stated that he would like to see "a hand of iron" carry out the ongoing economic transition. An alliance of right-wing military officers and conservative technocrats is a future possibility, principally in the Yeltsin camp, though not necessarily so. Furthermore, many ordinary people are rightfully angry that they have constantly had to pay the price for policies decided upon by an elite that inhabits a world far removed from everyday life.

More optimistically, the people of the Soviet Union still have not made their real wishes clear. Until recently at least, they have been among the most literate people anywhere, and they have their own history in the twentieth century to draw from. Fortunately, the continuing debate between democrats and absolutists now must take place throughout the fragmenting empire, and not just in Moscow. What was once a struggle within the party, now becomes a real question for nationalists: What kind of nationalism do we want? And the Yugoslavian example serves as a vivid illustration of what should not be done.

Finally, we in the West bear great responsibility for the outcome of this drama. Surely, the issue of control over nuclear weapons, which surfaced immediately after the failed coup, reminds us that the Soviet crisis is also our own. Too often, our leaders have applied a full-court press against our supposed antagonists, seemingly oblivious to the truth that to constantly seek advantage in the global age must bring trouble for ourselves. No doubt some Western leaders would secretly welcome a "Chilean solution" for the Soviet Union, simply because they are so deeply worried about financial stability. Such temptations must be resisted. The bottom line is democracy—in nations, federations, and in the world.

PATRICK BARNARD

Patrick Barnard is a Canadian journalist specializing in international affairs. He has contributed to the Nation *and* Newsday *as well as* Commonweal.

LIMITS ON LITIGATION

CAPPING A GUSHER

WHAT PUNITIVE DAMAGES COST

The nation needs a complete overhaul of its legal system, particularly its civil adjudication: the number of lawsuits, the delay in trials, the universal fear among businessmen and doctors of doing anything new or risky for fear some innovative lawyer will sue, are all virtually overwhelming.

The problem is becoming clearer every day, so much so that even Dan Quayle has seen it. For example, the health-care system in this country—which leaves some 75 million people without full coverage—already costs 13 percent of our GNP. At the current rate of increase, it will be up to 15 percent by 1995. One of the reasons for these escalating costs—higher per capita than in any other industrial nation in the world—is what is called "defensive" medicine, i.e., many tests of an expensive nature that are needlessly done to anticipate lawsuits against the doctor or the health-care

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facility. Any health-care provider can supply you with horror stories documenting this kind of waste.

How then can we cut down on the amount of litigation and still give people equitable access to the courts for reasonable redress of grievances? How can we protect insurance companies from commonplace and vexatious suits that are frequently settled out of court because it costs too much for companies to go to trial? Today, many "nuisance" suits are settled for injuries which are either nonexistent or extremely transitory while bona fide injuries go uncompensated. What can be done about plaintiffs awarded millions—amounts far beyond the need for care and special services?

For example, in Harris County, Texas, in April 1991, two children who were unguarded as their mother slept, fell into the apartment complex's swimming pool. One boy drowned. The other was revived, but because his brain had been deprived of oxygen, he suffered severe mental impairment. The jury awarded $84 million against the complex for negligence (of which $17 million was pure cash from the complex's insurance policy). This result is absurd in every respect. The child will never need anywhere near that amount over a lifetime, while the attorneys simply got rich on one case. Moreover, one way or the other, the public will ultimately have to eat the bill through higher premiums. How can we avoid such unjust awards and still provide for deserving accident victims (e.g., those injured by uninsured motorists, people who have no money to hire an attorney, small injuries requiring minimal amounts which can not attract an attorney, etc.)?

These questions are complex and no one solution can cover them all, but I have a few suggestions.

1. One of the most curious anomalies of the law is the concept of punitive damages. In theory, if the defendant's actions are egregious or intentional enough, a jury may award damages to deter such behavior generally. In effect, punitive ("exemplary") damages are public in nature, that is, they are awarded to teach others in society not to follow the defendant's example. But if that is the purpose of punitive awards, they do not really belong to the victim or to his attorney; they belong to the public. As the system now works, however, punitive damages make attorney fees enormously attractive. To deter unreasonable suits, punitive damages should be designated to a state-controlled public fund to support victims who usually cannot recover damages (e.g., from an uninsured motorist, a bankrupt insurance company, low insurance coverage, etc.). If punitive damages were so structured, the incentives for attorneys would be diminished and lawsuits would be brought to a quicker end.

2. In automobile insurance claims or for medical malpractice, an arbitration board should be set up to examine the claims of the victims. Each side would offer its best argument with a minimum of procedural technicalities. Each panel would be composed of two-thirds lawyers and one-third laypersons. These panels would examine the evidence and, like workman's compensation boards, determine payment. For claims under $50,000, nonbinding arbitration would operate.

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3. If a bona fide offer of settlement (whether from an arbitration board or from an insurance company or another private or public source) is rejected, then recourse to the courts would be available. But if the plaintiff received less than or as much as originally offered, the plaintiff would be obligated to pay all the costs and attorney fees of the other side off the top. Obviously, people will be more likely to settle if they know there is a good chance of getting less by going to trial than by accepting the settlement. When there is a fair offer on the table, the plaintiffs should have no right to risk the costs and expenses of the other side without running some risk themselves.

4. In England the losing side pays the costs of the attorney on the other side. That, however, would be unfair in our courts because it would mean that many poor people would be excluded from the legal system (they would have to put the money in escrow before trial). A modified contingency-fee arrangement such as the one described in point 3 above would be a fair compromise.

5. One of the real problems faced by a "little" person going against a large corporation or a rich person, is that the well-to-do can bury the smaller adversary in paper motions and time spent in court pleading these motions. The poorer party simply cannot afford the legal fees involved in answering and litigating in court. He or she usually gives up. One of the remedies for this situation is the old requirement that the parties plead and answer their cases in detail before trial—not just alleging some general tort or wrong done to the plaintiff. This would avoid costly discovery processes, sifting through (and asking for) thousands of pages of memoranda, reports, and analysis. In other words, a detailed analysis of the truth or falsity of the allegation would then be required of both the plaintiff and the defendant in each case; discovery should be direct, to the point, and not a fishing expedition. Trial judges should impose draconian sanctions on those who abuse the process.

"They're on to us!"

6. Finally, while no one has been able to measure pain and suffering (no one finally can), states must establish an upper limit on awards ($250,000 maximum? Actual and future medical care, working capacity, out-of-pocket losses need not be limited). A limit on pain and suffering awards would drastically cut down the number of lawsuits. Lawyers will not find it profitable to pursue long drawn-out cases.

These recommendations can be acted on immediately. If implemented, there would be fewer millionaire lawyers, a lot more deserving litigants, and our jammed court dockets would be cleared in short order.

PETER RIGA

Peter Riga is a lawyer. He lives in Houston, Texas.

OF SEVERAL MINDS David R. Carlin, Jr.

THE NEW/OLD ABORTION BATTLE

TAKING UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF

Within a week in late June of this year two events took place which indicate that the abortion/choice issue is likely to become more central than ever in American political debate, and likely to remain at the center for the next generation or so.

I refer to (1) the enactment in Louisiana, by means of an override of the governor's veto, of a very strict anti-abortion law which will prohibit abortions except to save the life of the woman and in cases of rape and incest when these are promptly reported; and (2) the resignation from the U.S. Supreme Court of Thurgood Marshall, one of the last of the thoroughbred liberals on a Court which has grown increasingly conservative.

Marshall's replacement will almost certainly carry the Court further in its conservative drift, a drift likely to include either an outright reversal of *Roe* v. *Wade* or at least a significant revision of that landmark decision of 1973, which declared abortion on demand to be an American constitutional right. If the post-Marshall court is looking for an extreme test case to use in dismantling *Roe*, the new Louisiana law is just what the doctor ordered.

Up till now the battle between the prolife and prochoice parties has been a case of relatively small-scale warfare. For the most part the combatants have been the companies of true believers at opposite ends of the spectrum: at the prochoice end, those who believe that any erosion of the status quo (for example, requiring parental or spousal notification or mandating a twenty-four-hour waiting period) is nothing less than tyranny; at the prolife end, those who believe that abortion for any reason except to save the life of the woman is murder.

In the meantime, most Americans have been somewhere in the middle, partly agreeing with the prolifers, partly with the prochoicers, but always hoping that the issue would somehow resolve itself and quietly go away. But it hasn't gone away, and it won't. Just the opposite. When the court revises or reverses *Roe*, the abortion issue will be thrown back to the fifty state legislatures—which is precisely where it was nearly twenty years ago when the

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Supreme Court terminated the nationwide debate in the state capitols by usurping jurisdiction. And when this happens, all those Americans in the middle will no longer be able to avoid the issue. When they vote for their fifty governors and their 7,461 state legislators, they will be forced to take into consideration the position candidates hold on the abortion/choice question. Small-scale warfare is about to be replaced by total war.

This promises to be the deepest and most intense moral controversy to rock the nation since Prohibition, perhaps since slavery. In fact, it will probably be fiercer than the prohibition battle, since the opposing parties stand further apart in their views in the current controversy. Prolifers consider abortion to be a far greater evil than prohibitionists considered alcohol; and prochoicers consider the right to abortion a far more sacred right than the "wets" considered their right to drink.

So it is likely to be the hottest moral struggle since the abolition/slavery fight of the 1830s, '40s, and '50s. I don't say this to suggest that the country is on the verge of falling apart or plunging into civil war. Fortunately, there is no chance of that happening this time around. We have a strong national government now, which was not the case in the middle of the 1800s. Besides, the prolife/prochoice division does not cut sharply along sectional lines, even though the prolife party tends to be stronger in the South than elsewhere.

But the avoidance of civil war may be one of the few consolations the years to come will have to offer. The battle will otherwise be exceedingly intense and distasteful. Political careers will be made and broken. Old friends will stop speaking. Brother will argue against brother, sister against sister, parents against children. All in all, it will be a very unpleasant business.

The reason for all this intensity and unpleasantness has to do with more than just abortion versus choice, important though those subjects are. But they are the twin peaks of a much larger moral iceberg. What ultimately divides the prolife from the prochoice party is not simply a disagreement on the right to abortion but a much deeper philosophical disagreement, from which their differences on abortion follow the way a conclusion follows from its premises.

The deeper philosophical disagreement is this: The prochoicers are moral agnostics; the prolifers are not.

The former have no belief in the objectivity of moral values, or at least no confidence that those values can be known. Thus there can be no agreement as to what constitutes the good life for human beings. Every person's individual view of the good life is just as valid as every other person's. If you and I differ in our moral views, there is no way either of us can prove the other wrong; all we can do is tolerate our mutual differences. But if there is no science of the good life and no inner light to reveal it to me, how do I find my values and my moral code? I choose; I simply choose; there is no alternative. In the world of the moral agnostic, choice is the essential action and tolerance the supreme virtue.

From this moral agnosticism the prolifer dissents totally, believing instead that moral values are objective realities; that differences between right and wrong are knowable; that some views of the good life are plainly superior to others; and that we are not reduced to sheer choice when searching for direction in life.

The huge controversy that waits around the corner is bound to produce much bitterness. Yet if we frame the question in the right way, it may produce a certain amount of light as well. I believe the prolife party is already pretty much aware of the moral epistemology that underlies its position. But among the prochoice party and its sympathizers, some are aware, some are not. Many understand very clearly that they are moral agnostics and that this agnosticism implies moral anarchy; and they are content that this should be so. But others are far from having thought the matter through. While value agnostics on the abortion question, they reserve the right to be value dogmatists on other questions. It has not yet dawned on them that you can't have it both ways, at least not in the long run. And when it does dawn on them, many among them will recoil from their position.

If the prolife party can frame the abortion question as part of the larger question —moral skepticism and nihilism versus moral rationality and order—then some of the marginal prochoicers and their fellow travelers may be won over. At all events, such a framing of the question will be a service to clarity in what will probably be the most important public debate in the next generation.

OF SEVERAL MINDS Abigail McCarthy

THE COUNTRY OF THE OLD

BETTER THAN WE THINK

To be old in America is to live in a strange uncharted country. Today's is the first large population of elderly to live such long and such active lives. As we know, the life expectancy of the average American has been extended more than thirty years since the turn of the century. There are no precedents for living in that extended time, no history of people having ever done so. How is it then in the country of the old? Generations have thought of long life as a blessing; the psalms promise that the days of the upright "shall be long in the land." But apparently the old in this new extended time do not feel blessed.

A manual for suicide is a runaway on the best seller list. One of our supposedly most civilized states, the state of Washington, advances toward the legalization of euthanasia. (See, *Commonweal* Supplement, August 9, 1991.) Whatever the benefits of a longer life they seem to be overshadowed by the spectral fears haunting the elderly. They fear a long, painful, and disfiguring death, or death in a vegetative state hooked to sophisticated machines while hospital bills eat up their insurance and savings. They fear that their families will be overburdened by their

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prolonged care and the expense it entails. They dread losing control of their lives by consignment to nursing homes where they may well be in the hands of callous and un-trained caregivers.

All this is sad because these fears and the perceptions, based on the exceptional, which fuel them are belied by the actual experience of those living in the country of the old. *Most elderly Americans, for example, die peaceful and relatively painless deaths.* That was the surprising finding of two recent studies.

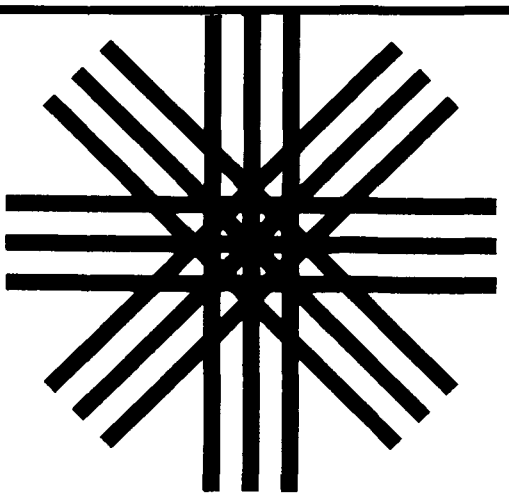
The first was reported by William Booth in an article in the *Washington Post* (July 22, 1991)—an article since widely syndicated—on a study by the National Institute on Aging of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of 1,000 persons over sixty-five in Fairfield County, Connecticut. These were people who died of the same causes and in similar proportions to the average elderly American: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and pneumonia led the list.

"Health did not deteriorate until fairly near the end in most cases. More than half were in good or excellent health a year before they died....About 10 percent were in good health the day before. About one-third knew death was approaching."

The majority of those studied spent their last days at home with family and friends, "fully aware of their surroundings, often in control of their bodily functions and without pain." Added to the findings of the National Institute (also reported by Booth) are those of M. Powell Lawton of The Philadelphia Geriatric Center. Based on his queries of the survivors of recently deceased persons, Lawton's conclusions were that even in their last month 65 percent of those who died had a positive quality of life. And many experienced a feeling of hope. "Having hope didn't mean they believed they were going to live," Lawton said, "it meant they had something to live a little while longer for."

How different is this experience of death from that so widely feared and that against which we seek to legislate? Because the country of the old is so largely uncharted the prevailing perception has been warped by a focus on the tragic experience of a minority of the dying. Like ancient mapmakers we have filled the uncharted areas with chimeras and dragons. In doing so we have resorted to extreme solutions. Technology, as the hospice movement teaches us, is not necessarily the answer to suffering or deterioration. Nursing homes are clearly not the best answer to housing in the country of the old. Again, just as most Americans die peacefully, most elderly Americans never go into nursing homes. Creative alternatives for the care of those with flagging energies abound. There is day care for the elderly, for instance, and shared housing—the partnering of those who can help each other.

The *New York Times* (August 18, 1991) reported in an editorial that Oregon recently sought and received a waiver to move Medicaid patients out of nursing homes and into apartments. "The state provided day help and, when necessary, nursing services. Costs went down and the quality of life went up." As we find out what the situation in the country of the old is, we find more and more ways of making it habitable—a place in time where there is opportunity for rest, reflection, and enjoyment. □



THE GRAYMOOR PRIZE

The Friars of the Atonement announce the second annual Graymoor Prize, to be awarded to the best essay on any aspect of ecumenical or interreligious affairs. The prize is intended to encourage and support new ecumenical and interreligious ideas and perspectives. The award-winning submission, which may take the form of a scholarly or critical essay or a personal narrative, should appeal to the interests of the general educated reader.

Original and unpublished essays of approximately 2500-4000 words should be submitted to the editors of COMMONWEAL who will make the final decision following consultation with a panel of experts. The winning essay will receive a prize of $1,000 and will be published in COMMONWEAL. The editors reserve the right not to award the prize.

Deadline: October 1, 1991. Announcement of Prize: December 15, 1991. The prize-winning essay will be published in COMMONWEAL's January 17, 1992 issue. This essay will become the property of the Graymoor Ecumenical Institute. All other essays will be returned to their authors after January 1.

COMMONWEAL 15 Dutch Street New York, New York 10038

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THE SINGER OF ALL OUR SONGS

THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS, THE GOD OF OURSELVES

NANCY M. HAEGEL

"I'm sorry," said the pleasant woman behind the desk, "but the course you requested has been canceled." My face fell and my spirits plummeted even lower. There I was, on time, fully enrolled and even prepaid, and now she was telling me it was all in vain. "But don't worry," she continued, "we have another class that is very similar and I'm sure you'll enjoy it. It's called 'Psychology and Jewish Spirituality,' and they're meeting right down the hallway to your right....Next in line."

I moved off to the side and pondered my options. I had enrolled in a course called "The Hebrew Bible and the Jewish World View" and had driven to the University of Judaism, at the crest of Mulholland Drive in Los Angeles, with a sense of adventure and excitement. I had always been fascinated with the religious tradition of Judaism, and this seemed like a great opportunity to venture into a world that I previously had only admired from afar.

But "Psychology and Jewish Spirituality"? "The Hebrew Bible and the Jewish World View" sounded safe enough. Taught by a Reform rabbi, mentioned in the UCLA extension course list, it appeared to be a natural place for a curious Catholic interested in learning about another tradition. The name "Psychology and Jewish Spirituality," by contrast, seemed to convey slightly more in the way of prerequisites than a cursory familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures and a few tourist photos of Masada. Still, I *had* already driven all this way, paid my money, and set aside my Monday nights for the next eight weeks.

I walked into the class and found a large group gathered. We waited patiently as the clock slowly ticked past the 7:45 starting time. Eight o'clock came and went and then finally, as I was preparing to offer the evening up as a lost cause and head out the door, the instructor arrived. He wore a yarmulke, the only one in the classroom, and he began by asking us to identify ourselves and say why we were there. By the time my turn arrived, enough other people had offered the cancellation of the other class as motivation for their presence that I simply followed suit. The rabbi, this one of the Conservative school, offered something in response about God often leading us into unplanned paths and class began.

The Bible, we were told, begins with the Hebrew letter *Bet*, symbol of duality, a sign of creative tension: Judaism and psychology, compassion and judgment, the God of our ancestors and the God of ourselves. These would be our topics. We would read, discuss, write, and pray. Religion, from the Latin *religio*, or *religare*, means to bind back together, to make whole, and we would seek wholeness. The rabbi was articulate and enthusiastic, obviously well read and educated in and outside his own tradition. He had a detached sense, a sense of seeing the generations gone by and those to come, while most of us struggled with the more mundane issues of books to be read and the paperwork to be completed. We talked about Moses and about being open to God and I began to sense that I was in a Jewish class. All things were open to debate and discussion. We analyzed and examined ideas, paying special attention to what others had thought before. Only one thing both motivated and encompassed

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the rabbi's teaching and questions. Only one thing mattered amid the forms and the parking and "opening day" bureaucracy: only God, the only worthwhile object of transcendence. "Do you need these forms?" one woman asked. He paused, with a quizzical look. "No, I don't think they're essential to me. But I'll take them if you wish."

The next week the class was much smaller. Among all the "Jewish World View" refugees, I was the only one remaining. I had enjoyed the last evening so much, had gone home with such a sense of excitement and discovery that I wanted to return. I would feel out of place, would be the only one who couldn't read Hebrew, and wouldn't know the prayers, but I wanted to return. After class I approached the rabbi. "I'm enjoying the class very much, and I'd like to stay," I said. "I'm not Jewish." His glance told me that that was not a revelation. He nodded, a gesture that could have been interpreted as approval or dismissal. I took it as both and knew that I would be back next week.

The pattern of the class became established and I knew what to expect each week. We took turns reading aloud and soon learned to pause in mid-sentence to allow the rabbi to fill in the Hebrew parts of the phrases. We discussed what we read, and my Jewish classmates, with their backgrounds ranging from Orthodox who had embraced Reform to Reform Jews who were moving toward Orthodoxy, told the stories of their lives. The individual stories blended with the stories of thousands of years, until it almost seemed that the great figures of Jewish history walked through the classroom and stopped to chat with those who were on the journey.

One evening we were discussing the Sabbath, with all its richness and meaning for the Jews. "When sundown comes and Sabbath begins," said the rabbi, "it is a special time." So often one thinks of things that the Jews do not do on the Sabbath, giving little thought to the special things they do. On the Sabbath, the economic machine that drives our society stops for the observant Jew. If it runs, it runs without his aid. That one act, that repetitive, traditional act of fidelity, carried on for thousands of years, assures that though the world may have his body, it will never completely own his soul. It occurred to me that we used to do that as Catholics. For the first time it seemed significant that we had stopped.

As I was musing about the power of the symbol, the conversation shifted. "Suppose we don't get home before sundown," one woman asked. "Should we still light the candles?" All eyes turned to the rabbi. Suddenly I could have been in any class, in any church. The question has been posed and now we wait for Father, Rabbi, Reverend to answer. But this rabbi was not ready to fall prey to the temptation. "How does it feel to you when you light the candles late?" he inquired, in his best psychology-and-spirituality fashion. "Do you still find meaning in the ceremony?" "Yes," she replied, "and the children enjoy it, but my Orthodox friends say we shouldn't do it after sundown." Both Catholics and Jews have orthodox friends.

At the end of each class, we took some time for prayer and meditation. We danced, circling the room holding hands; we sang Hebrew hymns, swaying to the rhythm of words that I knew without understanding; we sat in silence, meditating on the source of our lives. Once, during a quiet meditation period, the sound of the shofar burst into the silence. The group next door, a class for people preparing to marry in the Jewish tradition, was learning about the symbols of their faith. Never, in all my experience, have I felt God so close and so present. In a tradition that was foreign and a language I did not understand, He was as tangible as the bread and wine of my Catholic faith.

We moved on to study the mystics, learning about the Hasidic emphasis on experience and mysticism and then concentrating on the writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. Chief rabbi of Jerusalem from 1919-35, Rabbi Kook was also a modern mystic. His editor tells us that Rabbi Kook produced his more significant writings in the form of a personal journal, with daily meditations unfolding from experience. As a journal keeper myself, I felt that we at least had that in common.

As I read, it became clear to me a mystic is one who sees beyond the divisions, who sees oneness amid the diversity. A mystic, regardless of tradition, sees beyond the world of men and women to the all-encompassing world of God. Still, sometimes reading Kook was difficult and I had to force myself ahead. The transition from Palestine to Los Angeles and the translation from the language of the mystic to my own required more than I brought to the task. Then one night, so tired that my head was nodding and my eyes closing, I came upon the following passage:

> There is one who sings the song of his own life, and in himself he finds everything, his full spiritual satisfaction.
>
> There is another who sings the song of his people. He leaves the circle of his own individual self, because he finds it without sufficient breadth, without an idealistic basis. He aspires toward the heights, and he attaches himself with a gentle love to the community of Israel. Together with her he sings her songs. He feels grieved in her afflictions and delights in her hopes. He contemplates noble and pure thoughts about her past and her future, and probes with love and wisdom her inner spiritual essence.
>
> There is another who reaches toward more distant realms, and he goes beyond the boundary of Israel to sing the song of man. His spirit extends to the wider vistas of the majesty of man generally, and his noble essence. He aspires toward man's general goal and looks forward toward his higher perfection. From this source of life he draws the subjects of his meditation and study, his aspirations and visions.
>
> Then there is one who rises toward wider horizons, until he links himself with all existence, with all God's creatures, with all worlds, and he sings his song with all of them. It is of one such as this that tradition has said that whoever sings a portion of song each day is assured of having a share in the world to come.
>
> And then there is one who rises with all these songs in one ensemble, and they all join their voices. Together they sing their song with beauty, each one lends vitality and life to the other. They are sounds of joy and gladness, sounds of jubilation and celebration, sounds of ecstasy and holiness. (*Abraham Isaac Kook*, ed. B. Z. Bosker, Paulist Press, 1978.)

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I read it once, stopped, and read it again. The words literally danced on the page. I read it a third time, out loud alone in my room. I heard a voice that was not my own. In a way that I did not understand and could never explain, the words spoke to the heart. The skeptic, the doubter, the consigner of mysticism to the realm of intellectual curiosity was having a mystical experience with Rav Kook.

We met for the final class the next evening. As always, we read aloud, moving around the room at random, covering the final passages that the rabbi wanted to share. We read a lengthy section from *The Lights of Penitence* and talked about the ideas. I was miles away, thinking about last night's experience and concluding that it was the stuff of dreams. Mysticism in dreams can be dismissed. Mysticism in waking moments could change your life.

"As a final piece, let's turn to page 228. Nancy, would you read please?" the rabbi's voice filtered through my daze and I turned mechanically to the appropriate page. "There is one who sings the song of his own life," I heard myself begin. "...They are sounds of joy and gladness, sounds of jubilation and celebration, sounds of ecstasy and holiness." I was unable to participate in the discussion that followed. Why me? Coincidence? Had he known? Later we had a small farewell party, each one having brought something to share. I had come empty-handed, afraid that I would unwittingly break one of the food laws and embarrass myself or my new friends.

We deal all the time in paradox and duality. It is part of our relationships, our psychology, our science. Our minds have left and right brains; light and matter have both wave and particle nature. Even the Christian God has a triune nature. What is it then in the nature of religion that has allowed us over the years of history to divide ouselves by grasping at our little piece of the truth? What is lacking in our belief that compels us to try and force it upon others?

Eighty-five years ago the scientific worldview was changed when Einstein published a paper entitled "On a Heuristic View of the Nature of Light." In it, he suggested that light, which displayed itself daily in the wave-like properties of reflection, refraction, and diffraction (images in the mirror and rainbows in the sky) also had particle nature. The energy is quantized in packets called photons. Soon experiments were being interpreted in view of this new model, and things which had previously been mysterious became clear. For this work, Einstein received his Nobel Prize. Then in 1927, in another Nobel-Prize-winning piece of work, Davisson and Germer found that matter too—electrons, protons, and ultimately you and I—also has a wave/particle duality. Light and matter behave sometimes like wave and sometimes like a particle. They are both—and neither. The nature they display to you at any time depends in part on where you stand, on experiments you chose to perform.

What is instructive about the scientific analogy, for those who stand in awe of the diversity of the world's religious traditions, is that the reality is greater than our ability to experience it. Richard Feynman, another Nobel-Prize-winning physicist, wrote, "When we look for a certain phenomenon we cannot but help disturb it in a certain minimum way, and the disturbance is necessary for the consistency of the viewpoint." If you try to isolate the particle nature of light, if you seek solely to verify your own experience, you will lose the wave behavior. Similarly, to allow the wave behavior to appear, you must let go of the particle picture. "Truth" depends on where you stand; only by accepting the "truth" from many angles is the larger truth revealed.

And so with God? If the physical creation has this paradox built into its very core, does it reflect its creator? Does every religious tradition, every community, every individual have its vital piece of the whole? If you are a Christian, your Messiah has come. If you are a Jew, God is in the waiting. The Messiah has come and the Messiah has not come. Both are true, depending on where you stand. The larger truth, encompassing both, is God. "Then there is one who rises with all these songs in one ensemble, and they all join their voices. Together they sing their songs with beauty, each one lends vitality and life to the other. They are sounds of joy and gladness, sounds of jubilation and celebration, sounds of ecstasy and holiness." Would Rabbi Kook be offended if I suggested that the one who rises with all these things is God alone?

I learned a lot in "Psychology and Jewish Spirituality." Mainly I learned that the rabbi had it right the first evening. The forms are not essential. Only God. □

Timothy Hodor

The Lazarus Love

Before the eyes of autumn,
Another summer has evaporated into itself.
It has taken its warmth
To a soul we know by time.

I must go on
And part from
The sunken echoes of months
That have woven memories across my mind.

Birds begin their departure
And seek another sun.
I have nowhere to go
And no reason to move.

I study the leaves,
The bark, and the branches.
I have learned that nature
Plays dead in the winter.

This year, I play the same game:
I see a woman rising from the point of evaporation
And breaking free from the knot of sounds,
And I wonder when I should abort my dormant death.

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PRAYING AT AUSCHWITZ

A JOURNEY OF SORROW & HOPE

LEON KLENICKI

Thursday, April 4, 1991. At Kennedy Airport. I'm sitting waiting for the plane that will take me to Germany and Poland. At the invitation of Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, the archbishop of Krakow, I am to be part of the international council to discuss the study guide for the future Auschwitz Center of the archdiocese. I have been in contact with the cardinal since 1987 when we organized the first Catholic-Jewish theological colloquium in Poland. I still remember the discussions and the spiritual fervor of the encounter. I look forward to meeting with good old friends and other people who are willing to work together for planning the curriculum of the center.

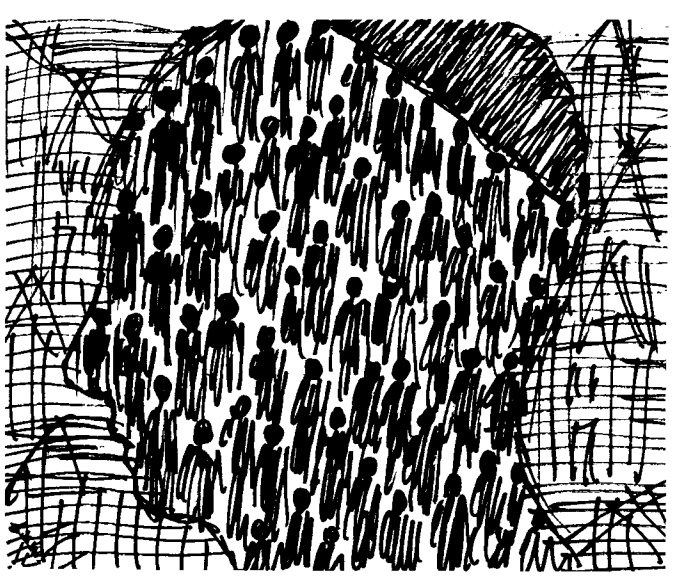
I feel, however, uneasy. I open the prayer book and pray the evening service. Why am I so melancholic? Why am I troubled about this trip? Why do I feel restless about going to Poland? This is my third visit to the country, and every time I feel a tightness in my stomach, a hardness in my heart. Why?

We are called to go into the plane. I sit at my place and pray the traveler's prayer. I recite clearly the old words of the prayer, "Behold, I send an angel before you to protect you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared." Has God prepared a place for me in Poland? Is Poland my place? The Poland of my parents and my family for several centuries? I repeat the end of the prayer in the midst of the plane's departing noise, "God will give might to his nation, God will bless his nation with peace." I add my own petition, "God of Israel, give me the peace of the heart for this trip to one of my sources. Amen."

Friday, April 5. Düsseldorf. I'm reciting the morning service in Germany. I don't think about present Germany, the economic welfare reflected in the airport, the well-fed citizens, prosperity itself. But I think of the Nazis, what they did in Germany, what they did to my people. Later on, I take a walk and look at the books in the stands; there are all kinds of novels and political books. I try to find something by Rainer Maria Rilke, the beloved poet of my youth. There is nothing. Finally, I sit down and wait for the plane that will take me to Poland.

On the plane there are few passengers, and I prepare myself for the meeting on Sunday. I'm reading Emmanuel Levinas's *Time and the Other*. In the introduction, the translator stresses a concept of Levinas's that would be reflected in many of his books. The French philosopher says that "the existence of God is sacred history itself, the sacredness of man's relation to man through which God may pass." I think of the future days, my contacts with Poles and Germans and the fact that it is so difficult for me to think that my relationship with them is a way through which God may pass. I feel that what passes all the time are memories of pain, of a pain I did not experience personally but I know from my family, and my readings.

I arrive at the Jesuit college where I'm warmly welcomed by the priests. We talk about the present democratic reality of Poland, of philosophy, of Catholic-Jewish relations. They have prepared a challah, the bread for the Friday night Sabbath celebration, candles, and wine. I have brought my own wine cup and candlesticks, as I do every time I have to be out of home on Friday nights. Some of the Jesuits are at my side when I say the blessing over the wine and the bread. I think of my wife, of my children, and of my family, of our life in the United States and Argentina. I also think of all of them who are ashes a few kilometers from here, at Auschwitz. My voice trembles but I continue with the prayers. I am surrounded by friends. But I think about a past that is still present for me and the Jewish people.



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Late that night, I'm awake; I cannot sleep. I think of a word that I mentioned at the meeting this morning. I think of triumphalism. I am in a rage because of Polish anti-Semitism that prepared the atmosphere for the Final Solution. I am in pain for my family who were gassed in Auschwitz, in October 1943. At the same time, I am concerned that this pain might become an end in itself. I fear the possibility of the triumphalism of pain entailing a use and abuse of this hurt that eventually might lead me to self-righteousness.

Saturday morning, April 6—Shabbath morning. I attend services at the small synagogue in the Krakow ghetto. It is the synagogue where Moses Isserles, the great codifier of Jewish religious law, prayed and taught.

It is the end of Passover and there will be a service of remembrance for the dead. Two old men are reciting the prayers. They do it slowly. One of them breaks down, and there are tears in many eyes. The community is a community of old people and memories of those days, 1939-45, come back to them, to me. I say Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, for Myriam, my beloved daughter, who died in an accident, and for all the members of our family who were massacred in World War II.

I speak to some of the members of the community. We communicate in Yiddish. The language comes back to my lips, the language of my youth, of conversations with my parents. I feel, strangely enough, at home. I do realize that despite my anxieties, the experience of my people, recent history, Poland is part of my home, that Poland is in my bones though I was not born here.

Saturday afternoon. I take a long walk through the streets of Krakow. I think about my feelings for Poland. I was not born here but all my family had been. What do I, a person born in Argentina, educated and living in the United States, totally committed to the Jewish faith, feel toward Poland? I confess negative feelings. Why do I resent the way people stare at me and at the yarmulke on top of my head? Why do I look back at them so aggressively at times? Why don't I try to talk with them? Why do I assume that they are anti-Semitic and not just curious?

Poland, which centuries ago welcomed and protected Jews, became, for many reasons, a bastion of anti-Semitism, especially in the 1930s. Experiences of racism were a common fact, and yellow benches were assigned to Jewish students in the university. Even after the war, Polish anti-Semitism still flourished and led to the Kielce pogrom in 1946 when forty-two Jews who survived the concentration camps were murdered by fellow Poles. Is anti-Semitism part of the collective unconscious of Poland? I do not want to accept this.

At evening I recite Havdalah, the prayers to say goodbye to the Shabbath: "*Hine El Yeshuati....*" "Behold God is my salvation...." God, why were my family, my people taken away by a devastating wind, the Shoah? No more questions....

But I cannot pray. I think of the Poles and their negative attitudes to my people. Am I anti-Polish in my reactions? I doubt it. The fact that I am here in search of meaning in my Polish roots, the fact that I accepted Cardinal Macharski's invitation, prove my desire, even need, to dialogue and consider together our relationship. A Polish Christian reckoning of the soul is needed to complete our own reconsideration of Poland. Jan Błonski in *Tygodnik Powszechny* expressed that need of a Christian reckoning. He wrote that:

> A question arises immediately whether this [the Poles' failure to act in defense of Jews] could be said not only of the Poles but equally well of the French, the English, the Russians, of the whole of the Christian world. Yes, indeed, it can. This responsibility is, indeed, our common responsibility. But it cannot be denied that it was in Poland that the greatest number of Jews lived. Consequently, we had the greatest moral obligation toward the Jewish people. Whether what was demanded of us was or was not beyond our ability to render, God alone must judge and historians will continue to debate. But for us, more than for any other nation, Jews were more of a problem, a challenge that we had to face.

A priest comes to visit me and we go to a cafe in downtown Krakow.

Sunday, April 7. Meeting at the episcopal palace to discuss the study guide. There are representatives from Poland and other countries. I meet some dear old friends and we talk about many matters of mutual religious concern, as well as family matters.

Cardinal Macharski is detained in Rome for the meeting of the Episcopal European Council. He apologizes through Father Stanislaw Musial who just came back from the United States. We recount the Passover ceremony we celebrated at my home and the many good memories of the Seder gathering.

The whole day is devoted to the study guide and the consideration of the purpose of the Auschwitz Center. The following day, Cardinal Macharski asks ADL's Braun Center for Holocaust Studies to prepare a study guide for the Auschwitz Center that will be adapted to Polish realities and conditions.

Monday, April 8. A young Jesuit, a very intelligent young man, volunteers to show me historic Krakow. We take a long walk through the city. We visit the market, the cathedral, very old buildings, and several bookstores. By chance, I meet Father Jozef Tischner who attended our 1988 theological colloquium. We embrace and his first question is, "Do you find any difference now in Poland?" I start laughing and remind him of our conversation in a hotel three years ago when he suddenly changed the subject of our political conversation because he realized that somebody was listening to us. We started talking about literature and the young fellow, who was standing nearby, a member of the secret police, left after awhile. Nowadays, we can talk openly on the street, criticizing the government or praising it, there is freedom! I point out that real democracy entails pluralism. Is Poland, is he, ready for pluralism?

My Jesuit friend and I have lunch together. He tells me that I'm the first Jew that he has met in his life. He seldom thought about Jews in his town, though it had a Jewish community before the war. He was born many years after the war. His father has told him several times about the Jewish community but never spent much time describing the situation of Jews in Poland before,

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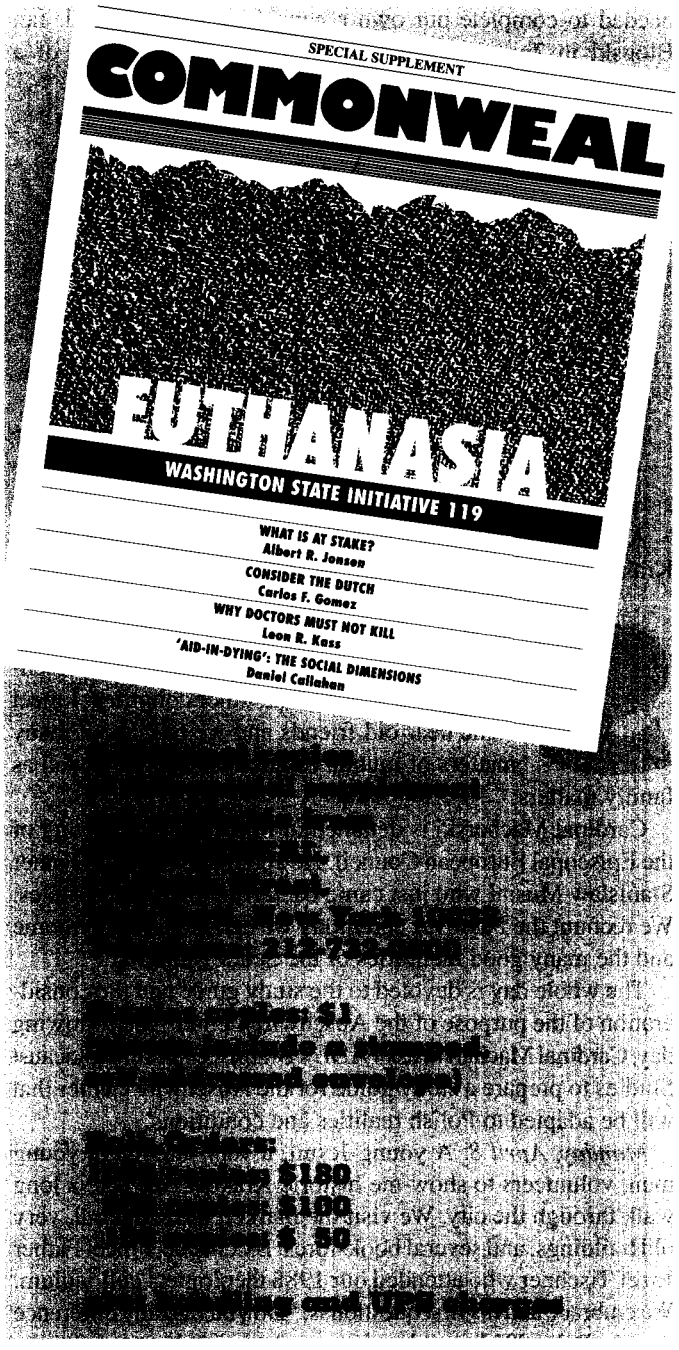

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during, or after the war. He asks me many questions and I realize the need for more information about the Jewish community. I also realize that we Jews were "the other nation" in Poland. There were the Catholics, and there were the Jews. I point out his usage of the terms "Poles" and "Jews." I have great reservations about using these terms. I really dislike such expressions. If I refer to a Jewish-Polish dialogue, am I suggesting the Jews were not and are not citizens of Poland? Should I refer to my family, which lived for centuries in Poland and who were gassed at Auschwitz, as Jews but not Poles? Do I have to believe that only Christians are considered to be Poles? He doesn't answer. He's immersed in his thoughts and afterwards, once again walking on the old streets, he apologizes for the terminology. But I also realize that perhaps the usage of the words Poles and Jews reflects better the sad situation before World War II. That is, that there were Poles, Christians or atheists, and there were Jews, religious or atheists.

Tuesday, April 9. Stanislaw and Marek Glownia take me in their car. Marek is the director of the Krakow Archdiocese Auschwitz Foundation. We do not talk much. We cannot for we know what is waiting for us. We arrive at Birkenau. We walk into the camp, a desert of ruined wooden shelters where the prisoners agonized. Stanislaw holds my hand. I recite Kaddish in memory of the dead. I cry between phrases. Then, silence. Stanislaw holds me with tears in his eyes. People are looking at us: a priest and a rabbi sharing the pain and sadness for the loss of millions of children, men, and women taken away by a diabolic wind. If every Christian would have done this, would the Nazis have executed their Final Solution? I cannot change the past, but I, Stanislaw, and many others can save the present and the future.

I walk alone for a while and pray.

Tuesday afternoon. I meet with the superior of the Auschwitz Convent, Sister Theresa, whom I know from my previous visits. She welcomes me warmly and expresses her wish to be in the new building. The convent, hopefully, will be ready in a year and a half.

We talk about family matters, and she is happy that Ruth, my daughter, is now married to Ira, and asks about my son Daniel's studies. We speak about Myriam. She prays for her every February, the anniversary of Myriam's death. We speak about spirituality, for the need to talk and dialogue in order to overcome misunderstandings or renew old controversies. She is hopeful that what happened with the convent will never happen again. "We need to be always in conversation," she says, "in order to avoid extremists of any side." We remain silent, and the dense essence of silence surrounds us. Indeed, we were prayerfully in silence.

After our conversation, I visit the site where the convent is being built. It is already two stories high and the person in charge of the construction tells me that they hope to finish it even before the appointed time. Much depends on the winter weather and funding. A wall and trees will separate the convent from the Archdiocese Auschwitz Center.

I also visit the site of this center. The meeting hall will be ready in a year. It is a three-floor structure consisting of several meeting rooms, dorms for students visiting the camp, two

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kitchens, one kosher, and a common dining room. The archdiocese hopes that the building will be inaugurated with the visit of an Israeli youth delegation. The rest of the center will have a library, a section for administration, a church, a hotel, and a place for prayer and meditation for non-Catholic visitors. Cardinal Macharski hopes that this special place will become a synagogue.

We go back to Krakow in silence. We cannot talk. We are still in awe from the visit to Auschwitz. We are sad, but hopeful that both the new Carmelite convent and the center will help to heal wounds and pains.

Wednesday, April 10. Early in the morning. There are no services at the synagogue. I pray by myself, in my room. Perhaps I'm the only Jew praying here in the city. I feel so strange! But this is the reality and I know that despite history I have to continue here or in any part of the world in my covenantal obligation to witness God. But it hurts very deeply to realize that Jews are not here anymore: We Jews are a shadow in Poland.

Stanislaw Musial and I meet to consider the publication of my paper on a Jewish understanding of Christianity. It will be published in the form of a booklet and be distributed through the dioceses all over the nation. I look forward to the comments of the readers. It might come as a surprise for them that a Jewish person studies Christianity for reasons beyond confrontation. We feel that this publication and others will allow for a process of mutual understanding.

I meet Jerzy Turowicz, editor-in-chief of the weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny (Universal Weekly),* and an old, dear friend. He's a brave man who fought the Nazis and the Communists and has been involved in Catholic-Jewish dialogue for many years. We talk about Catholic-Jewish relations in Poland. He feels that we need to go beyond talking, to an encounter of the heart to overcome the pain of the past. This is not easy. Anti-Catholic Polish feelings are in our hearts because of what happened in the thirties. Anti-Semitism is still a reality in Poland even though there are so few Jews in Polish society. I point out to Jerzy that all the political ads for Tadeusz Mazowiecki that I saw in Krakow had a Star of David graffitied on them. Mazowiecki was "accused" of coming from a Jewish family. What does it have to do with his political ideas? But the accusation of being Jewish is still a source of shame for Polish non-Jewish society. The evil was and is still there and needs a reckoning of the soul.

Jerzy and I agree that both Catholics and Jews require a reckoning of the soul. Catholics have to go over and reckon with the twentieth-century anti-Semitism that prepared the atmosphere for the extermination of the Jews. Christians have to overcome centuries of prejudice. We Jews have to overcome the weight, the pain, the burden of memories. This is not going to be easy. It is present there in Auschwitz, as well as on the walls of Krakow. The Polish bishops' new pastoral letter on Catholic-Jewish relations is a step forward. Its reading in every church is a way of popular implementation that will be reflected in teaching and preaching.

Thursday, April 11. On the plane to New York, I open my prayer book but cannot concentrate. I think of all these days in Krakow, their meaning. Suddenly there comes to my mind the words of Pope John Paul II in his speech to the European bishops:

> The war itself with its immense cruelty, a cruelty that reached its most brutal expression in the organized extermination of the Jews, as well as of the Gypsies and of other categories of people, revealed to the European the other side of a civilization that was inclined to feel superior to all others....Perhaps in no other war in history has man been so thoroughly trampled upon in his dignity and fundamental rights. An echo of the humiliation and even desperation caused by such an experience could be heard in the questions often repeated after the war: How can we go on living after Auschwitz? Sometimes another question presented itself: Is it still possible to speak about God after Auschwitz?

I do not want to talk about God; I need to act with God for a time of peace, of respect for others differently committed. The plane is leaving Warsaw; Poland will soon be behind me. What will never leave is the memory of the past, of family, my people. But because I believe, I know we have to work together, Catholics and Jews, for the future, a future to be built here in Poland and everywhere in the world.

I open the prayer book and pray. I cannot talk about God after Auschwitz; I can only perform my religious duties, which include accepting the other in faith: "May it be your will, God, our God and God of our ancestors, that you lead us to peace, emplace our footsteps toward peace, and make us reach our desired destination for life, gladness, and peace."

SCREEN

OVER THE EDGE?

'THELMA & LOUISE'

Scarfed and sunglassed like Jackie Onassis, the two women drive their Thunderbird convertible through the Southwest toward Mexico. They chug little bottles of Wild Turkey whiskey, bang on wheel and dashboard to the beat of the country and western music that blares from the car radio, and sing along raucously when they're not making spontaneous whoops of joy. A casual observer might take these two for college students cutting a class on Friday for a long weekend at the beach. And, quite plainly, life must be a beach for these women. They're on the loose. Carefree. Frolicsome. Game for anything. Living on the crest of the moment. Happy.

Thus Thelma, who has just committed armed robbery. Thus Louise, who left a man dead in Arkansas.

Psychopaths? Not at all. Hardened criminals? Mere neophytes. Crazed feminists, as some of the critics of *Thelma and Louise* seem to think? Well, they do blow up a fuel truck because its

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driver got lewd with them, but when that outraged macho man proclaims them "bitches from hell," the label just doesn't seem to fit. Hard-core retributionists in the sex wars would have shot up the driver, not the rig.

Thelma and Louise are not avenging furies. They are not hunting down guilty males or consciously redressing the injuries to their sex. They are good-hearted, plucky, even rather conventional women ("Now don't you litter," Louise admonishes her pal when the latter tosses some garbage on the ground) who set out on a fishing trip and end up getting chased by state troopers and the FBI into the Grand Canyon. At no time do they ever think of themselves as bandit queens or as representatives of anything sociological or political. When half-a-hundred police cars zoom into view just before the final chase, Louise gasps, and it may be the most poignant moment in the movie, "All this for us?" After all, before a rapist attacked Thelma and got blown away by Louise, all the two friends wanted was a fun weekend. All they wanted was to get away from it all. But what "it all" turns out to be, and just how Thelma and Louise get away, do indeed make this movie a feminist film, the most hopeless feminist film ever made. Yet, how exhilarating a hopeless film can be.

"It all" is the world of men, and *Thelma and Louise* demonstrates that, in a world ruled by and for men, the one route women can take to fulfill and enjoy themselves is the road toward death. The peculiar feat of *Thelma and Louise* is to make sense of the freedom felt by its heroines apprehensible while never letting the viewer forget the ultimate destination of the derailed vacation.

The joy that pervades so much of *Thelma and Louise* is the joy that comes from knowing that everything is going to end in a smash. In outline, this movie is as doomful as a piece of German Expressionism, but in its realization it is as loose, as rowdy, as violently insouciant as *Smokey and the Bandit*.

What fuels this movie isn't feminist rage at men but feminist disbelief: disbelief in male honor, male staunchness, male justice. Louise doesn't believe the police will credit the fact that the man she killed was trying to rape Thelma even though the evidence of some form of assault is right on Thelma's battered face. Thelma knows that her husband is in cahoots with the law the moment she hears his voice on the phone. Louise truly loves her boyfriend, Jimmy, but not believing he would be capable of enduring outlawry with her, she doesn't even tell him she's on the run. Neither woman believes that the legal system will treat them fairly, and the one lawman portrayed with sympathy—the Arkansas officer played by Harvey Keitel—is never given a chance by Louise to help her. Even mere competence isn't granted to the male of the species: a state trooper crumples into tears when the women get the drop on him, and the FBI officers idle helplessly in Thelma's house while waiting for her to call home. Even the rather gallant Jimmy probably gives information to the cops when they finally get to him (though this isn't shown). Only at the conclusion, when the law forces combine to trap the women, do men show any competence. That squad car formation is pretty frightening. But this is the competence an elephant displays when it crushes a flea. "All this for us?"

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Yet, because only disbelief in men, not rage, powers this film, none of the male characters, except the rapist, is characterized as truly evil, only as doltish (Thelma's husband), well-meaning but ultimately helpless (Jimmy, Keitel's lawman), rigid (the FBI agents), or dishonest but sexually alluring (the con man picked up by Thelma who robs her). Even the foul trucker is portrayed as only a laughable satyr who shows the courage of his abominable convictions when he refuses, at gunpoint, to apologize for his obscenity. Because their characters are drawn by scriptwriter Callie Khouri with some tang and humor, the actors can bring their talents into play rather than merely serve as macho strawmen. Harvey Keitel, finally employing an accent that doesn't defeat him, gives his best performance in years. Brad Pitt makes something amazing of the con artist: always pliant, never rebuffed by any rebuff, always promising to leave but never quite leaving, always seeming to give way but always taking and using, he turns this utterly worthless drifter into the psychological equivalent of a Judo master.

But the heart of the movie is the relationship between the title characters, and it is the portrayal of this relationship that both propounds and confounds the notion that the attachment between Thelma and Louise can serve as a feminist model of female bonding. Certainly the women give each other the sort of sisterly mutual support so extolled nowadays. Louise can plan (an escape route) while dippy Thelma sunbathes by a motel pool. But it is Thelma who can act (rob a store) when the fatalistic Louise falls into despair at the theft of their funds. And the performances of Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon beautifully complement each other: the former with her zigzagging vocalism and space-cadet dreaminess, the latter with her emotion-scored face and her formidable command of concentrated anger, despair, compassion, quizzicality.

Yet, as far as her relationship with Louise goes, Thelma might as well be called Thanatos. At the start of their trip, it is Thelma who brings along a revolver she doesn't know how to use but which Louise certainly will. It is Thelma who insists on stopping at the dance joint where they encounter the would-be rapist, and it is her naiveté that makes her ignore Louise's warnings against him. It is Thelma who insists (again against Louise's advice) on picking up the con artist who will steal the money the fugitives need for their escape. That Louise would trust the money with Thelma in the first place is an outrageous plot twist, and that the talented and usually inventive Ms. Khouri would stoop to such a ploy shows how eager she is to demonstrate Thelma's destructive contribution to the friendship. Thelma's amends is her robbery of a store, but this crime makes the police all the more eager and able to capture the pair. When Louise tentatively negotiates with Keitel, it is Thelma who hangs up the phone and asks Louise, "You're not going to give up on me, are you?" That is to say, you're not giving up on our outlaw life? Just before the police close in, Thelma declares that "something's crossed over in me" and that she's never felt so wide-awake. And the final catastrophe is brought on by Thelma's plea, "Let's just keep going," when there's nowhere to go but into the Grand Canyon. These friends may take turns driving, but, insofar as their adventure is a death-trip, Thelma is at the wheel all the way.

Khouri's juicy script gives director Ridley Scott the opportunity to do his best work since his first feature film, *The Duelists*. He always knows how to visually and aurally weight each moment in the story. Scott makes the shot that kills the rapist echo on the soundtrack like the roar of doom. When Louise shares a tender parting with her boyfriend in an eatery, Scott places some waitresses in the background of the shot so that their giggling, delighted faces seem perched on the heads of the lovers they are spying on. Not the least of Scott's achievements is to give the landscape through which the women move such an aura of masculinity (oil pumps vertically thrusting, weight lifters working out at filling stations, deserts that seem haunted by the ghost of John Ford) that their very passage through land so phallocentric becomes an act of defiance itself. And this background, a land claimed so emphatically by and for men, helps make the suicidal finale tolerably plausible. At least while you're watching the movie.

Thelma and Louise is a cultural milestone. It is the first feminist film that is also a work of absolute nihilism. Dismayingly, undeniably, it's a lot of fun, too. RICHARD ALLEVA

STAGE

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

'ROGERS FOLLIES' & 'BYE BYE BIRDIE'

"A Life in Revue" is the subtitle of *The Will Rogers Follies*, the still thriving show that this year won more Tony awards than any other, including one for best musical. Someone (perhaps Peter Stone, who did the book) had the interesting idea of presenting Rogers's biography as an edition of the *Ziegfeld Follies*. Rogers had been a Ziegfeld star. The sepulchral Mr. Ziegfeld (Gregory Peck's voice issuing from somewhere at the top of the theater) calls Will (Keith Carradine) and the other principals back from the grave to perform one last *Follies*. The show is neither ghostly nor metaphysical. The resurrection is simply a device, one that allows the playfulness of songs and sketches to refer to Rogers's personal and public life without even the pretense of accuracy that conventional show-business biographies (*Funny Girl, Sophie*) regularly violate in their search for the sentimental. Besides, Rogers was always fair game for fantasy biographers; in a profile in *Collier's* back in 1929, Ring Lardner wrote, "Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, as I may not have told you, have fourteen children, all named Pat."

If this is not quite Rogers, it is also not a *Ziegfeld Follies*. There are the girls, of course; but there are no featured singers and dancers and Will Rogers is the only famous comedian on hand, although in the real *Follies* he regularly shared the stage with the likes of W.C. Fields, Eddie Cantor, Fannie Brice, Bert Williams. What we have here is a lively song-and-dance show,

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in which a love story (Betty and Will) is combined with a cheerful caricature of the performer's Oklahoma beginnings and a nod toward his progress from rodeo performer to vaudeville to the *Follies*. The show does try to indicate the fame of the man with an opening number, "Will-a-Mania," that unhappily suggests that his was the fame of a pop star or—more likely—a soft drink, peddled through a hard-sell musical TV ad. Indeed, he *was* one of the best known Americans of the 1920s and '30s. "I had no suspicion of how important the man is," said Bernard Shaw, who met Rogers when he was playing in London in 1926. "Really, he is as important as I am." Rogers's celebrity, however, was not that of the opening number. The intimate of the rich and powerful, the idol of ordinary people, the "Cowboy Philosopher," as he—or his publisher—sometimes called him, built his following through radio, lectures, his newspaper column, finally the movies. The *Follies* pretty much ignores the real making of Will Rogers.

My recognizing the distance between the man and his depiction in the *Follies* is not intended as a criticism of the musical. It is a show that I enjoyed even though I find now that I remember little of Cy Coleman's music or the lyrics of Betty Comden and Adolph Green. What stay in my mind are Keith Carradine's performance and the imaginative staging by Tommy Tune, which pays tribute to the *Follies* form even as it goes about its business of making a 1990s' musical of a genre which had its best days before World War I. Carradine is an extremely personable performer, suggesting both the folksiness that went into the Rogers persona and the calculation that created it. He is unfortunately given mini-sermons—on ecology, for instance—which, although perfectly fine in what they have to say, rob Rogers of his comic method—deceptive statement following deceptive statement, upended finally by a barbed closing line. It is a device that would have served Carradine, too, even though he makes no attempt actually to imitate Rogers.

When Tommy Tune received his Tony awards for best direction and best choreography, the television show cut away from New York to the West Coast where Tune was appearing as Albert Peterson in *Bye Bye Birdie*. It is characteristic of Tommy Tune's energy that with two Broadway successes running at once (*Grand Hotel* is the other), he had become a performer again, taking his tapping feet on the road in a revival of a 1960 musical. I am suspicious of made-for-touring revivals with a star turn (*The Fantasticks* with Robert Goulet confirmed my worst forebodings), but the new *Bye Bye Birdie*, which I recently saw in Philadelphia, turned out to be a delightful production of a show that I have liked since I first saw it more than thirty years ago in a pre-Broadway try-out, also in Philadelphia. Although Ann Reinking, the other star, had left the cast, her replacement, Lenora Nemetz, was attractive and accomplished and even looked a little like Chita Rivera, the original Rose. The rest of the cast was just as good, and the company boasted a class director (Gene Saks) and designer (Peter Larking), whose charming set resembled giant and very fluid children's building toys.

There was no attempt to update the show—except for one throw-away line—and Michael Stewart's book is as funny as ever; the needles he gave to celebrity worship have not blunted with time. There is a new song for Tune to sing and dance, "A Giant Step," celebrating Albert's escape from his possessive mother, and "Spanish Rose," Chita Rivera's fine number, has been replaced by "He's Mine," a duet between Rose and Albert's mother. Perhaps "Spanish Rose" was dropped because the 1990s felt no need for the mandatory Spanish number that graced 1950s' musicals, but I suspect that the substitution was put in for the sake of Marilyn Cooper, who plays Mrs. Peterson. I remember feeling a little cheated back in 1960 when there was no song for the marvelous Kay Medford, who originally played the part. Neither of the new songs, presumably by Charles Strouse and Lee Adams, seems up to their original score, but that may be because I could sing-along with the other numbers. By general request from those around me, I did not. The choreography is by Edmond Kresley, who was one of the teen-agers in the original show, and he deserves commendation even as one suspects that Tommy Tune had a hand and a foot in the staging of his own numbers. Tune is, as usual, a beguiling performer, and if his Albert is more on the surface than the confused, harried character that Dick Van Dyck played, he is still a joyful presence in an admirable revival of a first-rate American musical.

GERALD WEALES

DANCE

BREATHING IN & OUT

MARTHA GRAHAM, R.I.P.

On a Monday afternoon this past June, one month after Martha Graham died, thirty-two boys and girls between the ages of eight and twelve strode confidently onto the stage of New York's City Center to be greeted with a rousing ovation. It was a specially invited audience; like others, I had a personal reason to be there. Soon the children began to jump, scoot, turn, twirl, stomp, stop and start, leap and bound into the air, onto the ground, in lines and clusters and circles of all lengths and sizes. The dance concert they were about to present was Martha Graham's last present to the world, to be opened after her death.

Suddenly, the children were facing the audience, standing stone-still in rows from stage apron to back wall, each child about an arm's distance from the next; a dance class, a Martha Graham dance class. They began to pound their chests, then swooped their arms up above their heads and reached from the pits of their stomachs through expanded chests and out through their arms into their fingers, and with an athletic "second effort," reached up a tad more, and shouted, "I love the sky." They all bent over and touched the floor, shook their heads and bounded up and bellowed, "I love the earth." It was a signature Graham exercise, by means of which Ms. Graham introduced students,

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young and old, to her technique, the precondition for which is that they fall in love with the world.

Before we could roar our approval, however, these proud and passionate children, already masters of timing, sneaked in "and the world we live in." Then we erupted in applause for this curtain-raiser entitled "To the Future," the first segment of the program. How savvy to begin a memorial concert with a toast to the future. What followed was equally and indelibly "Martha"—violent, passionate, visionary, and loving—and as American as the *Ziegfeld Follies,* Allegheny County, Pa. (where she was born), *Bonnie and Clyde,* and superhighways.

Ms. Graham's dances, more than 180 of them, were dramas constructed from a language as simple and complex as breathing in and breathing out. She and her dancers dived onto the floor, rolled around on it, wrestled with demons. She broke every rule of classical ballet: She yanked the toes back at the ankle and "flexed" the foot in a way that disgusted classical balletomanes, only to hoist it and the leg with it over her head by the quickest and shortest way (and most American), that is from the side and up. (To "purists" this was gawky and ugly.) She wrapped herself in stretch-jersey tube and contorted herself into jagged and ragged shapes; she danced without shoes, as did Isadora Duncan; she relegated music and sets to the background; she designed her own costumes, and often sewed them too; she used lighting mainly to shed light on her dancers.

Everything centered on the dancer and the dance. It was the dancer, her vision and presence, that consecrated a space. To her, a dancer was a conductor of the divine presence, and she and her dancers all sacred.

That Monday afternoon in June, the audience at City Center was brought into sacred space indeed.

After "To the Future," we delighted in "Acts of Light" (1981), a meticulous yet passionate exploration of love and power—emotional, sexual, political. We viewed a clip from a documentary film now in production and heard her voice, gentle yet commanding, and saw her sitting, Buddha-like, in her studio. Her ancient cheekbones revealing more than the make-up on them masked, her hair carefully arranged as always, she was coaching a dancer in "Maple Leaf Rag," the last work she choreographed (1990) at the age of ninety-six. This cinematic presence, at this point in the program, gently reminded us that she was dead.

Then we roared to "Maple Leaf Rag" itself, set to the music of Scott Joplin, in which Ms. Graham laughed at herself, spoofed her erotic and angst-ridden ballets. Yards of swirling skirts swooped across the stage of cartwheeling dancers, as others bounced on a board that swayed perilously across the middle of the stage like a mini-suspension bridge.

After the intermission, we journeyed deeper into the past with "Errand into the Maze" (1947), wherein two of the company explored the parameters of fear, and how fear is conquered by courage and vision. The program concluded with her first masterpiece "Primitive Mysteries" (1931), at whose premiere the world was put on notice that its choreographer and principal dancer was to change the course of dance forever. Agnes DeMille writes in *Vanity Fair* (July 1991) that it struck many as strange (on stage and off) that the dancers in this dramatic reinterpretation

of Roman Catholic rituals were mostly Jewish. But soon the dancers and the dance cut through all religious barriers. "When the girls took the stage it was not as professional dancers; it was as an army of acolytes. Both for them and for the audience it was a spiritual experience. The original girls came to know beatification. The audience gathered. They witnessed. When the curtain came down they rose and screamed. They gave Martha twenty-three curtain calls."

Six years later, "Primitive Mysteries" still packs a spiritual and emotional wallop. Ms. Graham sought out rituals that revealed the human heart, and the Catholic rites had always fascinated her. "Primitive Mysteries" begins and ends each of its three parts with silent processionals and recessionals; each segment explores Catholic symbols and Ms. Graham uses core doctrines of Catholicism to entitle each part of the ballet ("Hymn to the Virgin," "Crucifixus," and "Hosanna").

Viewed in this light another note in the program appeared less enigmatic: "At daybreak on May 1, 1991, Martha Graham's ashes joined her spirit in the mountains of Northern New Mexico and a Mass was said for her in the Sanctuario de Chimayo near Santa Fe." By no means could Martha Graham be called a Catholic. But that did not mean she did not understand the spirit that gives life to its rituals. On a personal note, only after recently seeing "Primitive Mysteries" did I realize why Ms. Graham welcomed my priestly visits after she was admitted to the hospital last January, and continued to greet me with warmth and humor during the months she spent in the hospital. It was not only that she was a gracious human being and impeccably hospitable, even in a hospital, but as I realized when I watched this ballet, she respected what Catholicism stood for and knew from studying its rituals that there was much truth in it. She also saw in me, one of its rites-conductors, a kindred soul, a person who may just have seen and experienced what she saw and experienced on her visits to the Sanctuario de Chimayo. How fitting that a Mass was offered in that church in her honor and memory.

On the afternoon of June 3, 1991, Martha Graham posthumously consecrated City Center, as she had many times before in life. In this concert, she showed us how she wanted to be remembered.

(Continued on page 519)

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POEMS
Michael Cadnum

Blackberries

Ants stream to the berrries, berries pricked
with hairs like anty legs. Birds
squall in the shadows. The sunken cellar
of the burned house swells
with living chains, spiked
and flourishing. A kind of eternity

the bee trembles upon, a kind that claws
the skin. This creekbed
is a place we cannot travel, red-black
with living barbed wire.

It leaves us
to our silence, a bounty
we cannot gather, a feast
armored by itself, as vast
and tangled as the days
we will not live, foundations
broken and scattered
under vines like the skeleton of fire.

Mine Shaft

The road here
scrawls, erased, wash-slashed, finally
not-road. A single black
plant of barbed wire, and a slide
of rocks hard as pennies.

Boards shrink
around square nails. Sun
slips through the gaps,
laying yellow strips veined
like meat in the dark.

Holding our breath,
everything we have done
is pointless. Spilled gravel whispers
from side to side, and ticks
the bottom. So far,
says the body.

Fall
in, says the body.
A sift
of sand stretches
and lets go.

The dark around every single
word we will ever say.

Drought Burn

Morning,
the rake handle palmed
gray, the lemon scent brightens the air,
leaves and brown rind raked into a pile.
Evening, the feral cats

pause at the saucer of chicken meat.
When they are gone, the meat-sweat
on the saucer is stroked
by a jewel, a wasp from the eaves

kissing the dish. We talk
into dark, crickets everywhere,
and when we hear something drinking
from the fishpond you mouth
"coyote," until he runs,
invisible behind the wisteria, past
the tractor roped by dried
morning glory to earth.

And our neighbor down the road begins
to break the law: he burns
his weeds, his secret fire
touching us with its black
breath. A man with a yellow setter,

and an easy laugh. We know how he
waits with his hose, his rake,
thinking: it will be all right.
Thinking no one knows.
Herding the red lizards of his fire.

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When the dancers left the stage at the end of "Primitive Mysteries," the lights that had bathed the children in "To the Future" two hours earlier slowly dimmed and Ms. Graham's absence settled over the hall. And this was a moment that many dreaded. For Ms. Graham had become famous for her final bows. Up until very recently, at the end of each of her concerts, Ms. Graham would take a curtain call that went like this: When the applause for the dancers of the program's final ballet had crested and began to subside, the act curtain would sink a foot deeper into the stage floor and then zoom up to reveal a glittering Ms. Graham, gloved hands gently on at her sides, her hair often bejeweled, center stage, aglow in a gown by Halston.

This afternoon, as the applause crested, the curtain remained up. Slowly the light began to dim on the empty stage.

The audience left the theater and were assaulted by a hot, humid, and blinding New York rush hour. Taxi horns blurted, couples dashed out of restaurants and toward theaters, boys and girls in shorts careened up West 55th Street on those newfangled roller blades, men and women in every imaginable costume, from business suit to halter top, navigated their ways through the crowd that was now flooding through City Center's doors.

Adrift in this ocean of New York street life, I found myself chanting, "I love the sky. I love the earth and the world I live in."

GARY SEIBERT

Gary Seibert, S.J., is in residence at St. Joseph's Church of Yorkville and is associate producer of Parish Video Library, Sparkill, N.Y.

BOOKS

Contending narratives, plausible truths

DEAD CERTAINTIES (UNWARRANTED SPECULATIONS)
Simon Schama
Knopf, $21, 333 pp.

David Castronovo

Simon Schama's *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, published in 1989, is a sweeping, dramatically presented story reminiscent, in its style of telling, of the great narrative histories of the nineteenth and twentieth century: Macaulay on England in the late seventeenth century, Michelet or Carlyle on revolutionary France, Barbara Tuchman or Edmund Wilson on political currents in the early twentieth century. Like them or not, you cannot deny their mastery of storytelling. Filled with personalities, highly developed intellectual and social contexts, and juicy anecdotes, Schama's *Citizens*—like those classics of readability—is what first-rate historical narration used to be like before our own age of academic scholarship, bar graphs, elaborately deployed methodologies, and endless qualifications couched in jargon.

Schama is the Mellon Professor in the Social Sciences at Harvard, and his gifts as writer as well as his deep learning make him an extraordinary figure in the scholarly world, someone with boundless enthusiasm for everything connected with modern history—manners and morals, debt management, art, curiosities and ironies of behavior of the powerful and the obscure. In *Citizens* he brings his humane and rather conservative intelligence to bear on the topic of revolutionary violence; he looks at people more closely than abstract forces and shows how their delirious idealisms, misreadings, and impulses led to several years of horror that point directly to the events of the 1930s and 1940s. Trusting to the biographical approach and keeping faith with Alexis de Tocqueville's skeptical, tragic sense of events, he seems to want little to do with contemporary ideologies or methods, preferring to immerse his readers in the "chaotic authenticity" of textured stories.

Since *Citizens* is so beautifully paced, the reader may wonder what's going on in Schama's latest volume, the brain-teasing *Dead Certainties*. Its chapters are unevenly proportioned; its episodes seem jagged; it jumps from passages that employ authorial interference to sections that are fabricated interior monologue assigned to people in the past. And Schama deals with two stories that seem quite distant from each other. One is about General James Wolfe, the fallen leader of the English forces in the French and Indian War and a martyr to the British idea of empire in the New World. The other is about a mid-nineteenth-century Harvard chemistry professor, John Webster, who doubtless killed another Harvard man, Dr. George Parkman, an eminent physician and exacting landlord, in a quarrel over a loan payment. The first death was heroic, worthy of historical paintings and panegyrics; the second was surrounded by ugly details, on both sides, that threatened to cling to old Harvard —Parkman's miserly fanaticism, snobbish Boston Brahmin denial, and the grisly matter of Dr. Parkman's (probably) dismembered body.

The connection between these two dead certainties—which soon emerge as quite uncertain in the reader's mind—is Francis Parkman, George Parkman's nephew who became a renowned historian specializing in the British-French conflict in Canada during the eighteenth century. Francis Parkman, a scholar who lived and breathed the destiny of General Wolfe, is in many ways the central figure of Schama's book: a chronically ill man who wrote a monumental work while contending with family tragedy and his own depression, he stands as an emblem of intellectual conquest, a

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hero who grappled with mountains of documents and emerged with his story—a masterpiece about the tormented General Wolfe. But the story of Wolfe, entangled with the fate of Parkman, soon makes us wonder about accuracy, versions of the truth, identification as distortion.

These curious plots thicken as we become aware of the fact that the book is about "the teasing gap separating a lived event and a subsequent narration." Schama presents an oftentimes unsettling search for "alternate accounts," a polyphonic recounting of stories about a hero and a criminal that "compete for credibility." In one chapter he uses Benjamin West's epic painting, *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770) as a document, analyzes its histrionic qualities and its use of the imagery of Christ's descent from the cross, and shows how the work in effect created one of the British Empire's finest hours. Always a dissolver of certainties, Schama points out the falsifications in the canvas, including the use of a contemplative Indian in the foreground. General Wolfe, in real life an Augustan racist, would hardly have liked this emphasis on the noble savage in the midst of his transfiguration.

The thematic link between Wolfe and Webster, never quite made explicit, involves the nature of violent death, how we record our impressions of it, create it as an event, and store it in our communal memory. By extension the book also explores mythmaking and stigmatizing, rituals of celebration and degradation, varieties of exoneration and mudslinging. Part 2, called "Death of a Harvard Man," is a concatenation of voices—people who felt sorry for the Webster family, President Spark ("Harvard professors do not often commit murder"), attorneys (with agendas and sometimes with consciences), and a large cast of Brahmins and ordinary working people. One of the aggressive instincts studied in the book is the status drive of the learned people in Cambridge: it amounted to their fastidiousness about the penny press and its "enthusiasts of the gallows," yet its accompanying Unitarianism—so much more genteel than old time Calvinist fulminating about sin—may have blinded Brahmins to the nature of the evidence against Webster and perhaps made them forget that they themselves shared in his colossal sin. Money obsession, keeping up professorial appearances, and the Brahmin idea of the gentleman may well have driven Webster crazy. In any event, the culpability of the case adhered to the prosecution side as well. Schama delineates the character of a judge who in effect helped the prosecutors by sermonizing, telling moralistic tales, and interpreting the events rather than the law. Webster, who was probably guilty as hell, nevertheless was convicted on very soft evidence. Attorneys, clergy, teachers, and doctors will unquestionably be absorbed by Schama's weaving of accounts: was Webster's trial and conviction, as one journalist put it, "a hunt of expiation and defamation" or a matter of justice served?

Two major ideas emerge from this cat's cradle of conflicting stories. The first is the responsibility of the historian. Telling stories about the past is a matter of piecing together fragments—"hailing someone who has just gone around the corner out of earshot." To forget this is to be seduced by scientific exactitude or ideological righteousness, both dangerous temptations for people entrusted with evaluating the plausibility of narratives. The fact that all documents and evidence from the past are in a sense imaginative constructs should not make investigators despair. Schama's point—embodied in his work—is far from the anything-can-mean-anything double talk one hears these days. It's a revolt against dead certainty without being a rejection of truth; it questions without eroding our sense of coherence. By the end of the volume Schama is slipping in another idea, essentially an affront to smug determinists of every stamp. Basically he's implying that the age of Romanticism—with its legends, myths, and tales—ended at the time of the trial of Webster in 1850. And with it came a disrespect for listening to all sorts of accounts and an inordinate respect for hard facts. Schama quietly laments this tendency, and, like Herodotus, prefers to be the kind of historian who collects seemingly fanciful bits and pieces in order to arrive at his version of the past. One can only admire him in our time of relentless surveys and endless unitary interpretations of why we are, like Wolfe and Webster, caught in a violent story.

DEMOCRACY 'SI,' EXPORT 'NO'

EXPORTING DEMOCRACY
The United States and Latin America
Edited by Abraham F. Lowenthal
The Johns Hopkins University Press, $55, 422 pp.

Robert E. White

This study was created to challenge the easy assumption, so prevalent in today's Washington, that the United States knows how to export democracy and should make that transfer a principal plank in policy toward Latin America. The authors believe deeply in democracy but most are skeptical, even cynical, about the motivation of the United States, its consistency, and its commitment for the long haul.

Exporting Democracy is a serious work by serious scholars. It begins with four chapters of historical overview, pre-World War II, post-World War II, the Alliance for Progress of John F. Kennedy, and the Reagan era. Five chapters then focus on case histories of U.S. attempts to advance democracy in Argentina, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Nicaragua. These are followed by discussions of the respective roles of U.S. business, U.S. labor, and U.S. economic policy. The book closes with two chapters of conclusions, mostly cautionary, about the value of direct programs to promote democracy. The authors call instead for restrained, respectful, sensitive, and patient diplomacy which would emphasize the protection of fundamental human rights,

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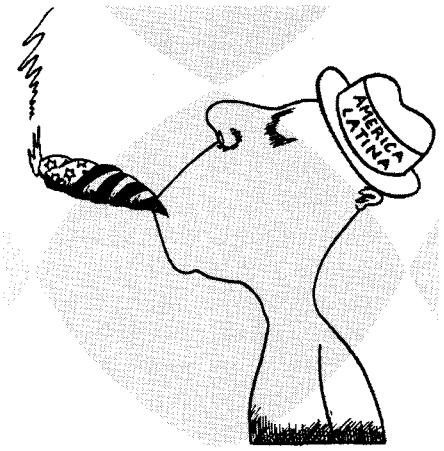


the denial of economic and military assistance to regimes that systematically abuse their citizens, and support for the democratic network that is building in the region. Of the many highly professional contributions, two deserve special mention: a discussion of the Alliance for Progress by Tony Smith and a summing up chapter by Lawrence Whitehead entitled "The Imposition of Democracy."

Tony Smith recognizes that although the Alliance for Progress ended up strengthening conservative forces in Latin America, it was a truly revolutionary initiative because of its insistence that to overcome poverty and to institute democracy, primary attention had to be paid to the redistribution of land. Land reform, he points out, may not guarantee democracy but it is a necessary precondition in many Latin Amer-ican countries "where concentrated ownership of the land typically not only created vast disparities in wealth that feed class conflict,but also provides the basis for a narrow elite of ruling families whose attitudes and practices are usually profoundly antidemocratic. It is simply naive to believe that the United States can introduce the entire panoply of political mechanisms characteristic of democracy, yet leave the social and economic structure untouched." By tackling land reform, the Alliance went right to the roots of the economic foundation for political repression in Latin America.

Unfortunately , the Alliance lost its way, as the former president of Chile, Eduardo Frei, once observed, because its first priority was to prevent a repetition of the Cuban revolution. This meant that democracy was only a means to an end. The counterinsurgency component of the Alliance grew and replaced social development as the first priority. Progressive forces in Latin America were increasingly distrusted as too ready to work with the radical Left. This made realization of the Alliance goals unattainable. Smith puts it this way:

> If Washington wanted to do more through the Alliance than it was doing for blacks at home, if it wanted to achieve more than it had accomplished in nearly half a century of rule in the Philippines, in short, if it wanted to encourage the kinds of changes it had produced in Japan under General MacArthur, but without military intervention and without assuming sovereign authority itself, then certainly its hope was altogether illusory if it could not count on a significant reformist element among the Latin Americans themselves.

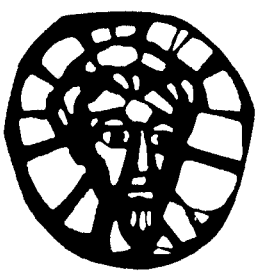
The commentary by Lawrence Whitehead has special relevance for the attempts of the Reagan and Bush administrations to impose democracy in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama. In one of the most perceptive and accurate comments in *Exporting Democracy*. Whitehead observes:

> For although a democratic regime may originate from an act of external imposition, it will subsequently be necessary to secure the withdrawal of intrusive foreign influences if the democracy is eventually to take root and to secure the trust and acceptance of the national society in question. Unfortunately this intuitively plausible model of the democratization process assumes the prior existence of a well-defined nation-state in which no major problems of national identity remain pending. It also implicitly views the act of imposition as an isolated event, rather than as one episode in a protracted sequence of interaction between a dominant nation and a subordinate one.

Whitehead nicely sums up the Reagan policy of exporting democracy to Central America with the observation that "under Reagan the State Department would adhere to a definition of the term designed to ensure that no form of Sandinismo, however toned down, would ever qualify, just as no form of façade democracy in El Salvador would ever be allowed to disqualify."

In relation to Panama, Whitehead describes our policies there as a "sorry record" and points out accurately that anti-U.S. nationalism is bound to recur because "it is inherent in the enterprise of promoting the appearance of national sovereignty while intrusively supervising the substance of local politics."

While this is an important and worthwhile book, I have strong disagreements with its organization which, I believe, severely limits its value. It is crucial to the understanding of U.S. relations with Latin America that the watershed event in the modern political history of Latin America took place in Guatemala in 1954. Confronted with an inept leftist government feebly attempting to play off the Soviet Union against the United States, Washington furnished arms to rebel groups based in Nicaragua and Honduras, and when General Castillo Armas and his band arrived in Guatemala City, the United States immediately recognized his regime



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and showered it with grants and loans. No one has ever bothered to deny that this was an initiative of the U.S. government from start to finish.

With this action the United States left the path of judicious application of diplomatic influence and respect for sovereignty, juridical equality, and territorial integrity. In place of these principles that have served as the accepted basis of international conduct among independent states, the United States directed the preponderance of its resources toward strengthening the Latin American military establishments and fighting an ill-defined communism, usually designated as subversion, through overstaffed military missions, huge CIA stations, and public-safety programs.

To devote an entire chapter each to U.S. business and U.S. labor and to have no separate discussions of the roles of the U.S. military and the CIA is to confuse subsidiary forces of occasional importance with primary actors which, either separately or together, have held the whip hand over key elements of U.S. policy toward the region for decades.

Since World War II, no president has failed to announce that his priority for Latin America was to advance democracy. As I read history, only one succeeded—Jimmy Carter. Although only applied intermittently and with great variations from country to country, the Carter human rights policy had profound and beneficial effects throughout the region. Barbaric practices of mass murder, institutionalized torture, and officially sponsored disappearances practically came to an end everywhere except El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chile. Press freedom gained substantial ground and a national debate got underway in every nondemocratic state (except Cuba) regarding the abuses of the regimes under which they lived and the need for political freedom if bloody revolution was to be avoided. During Carter's term of office the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Bolivia returned to constitutional government. Elections were scheduled in Honduras and Peru. Somoza was thrown out of Nicaragua and in El Salvador a reform government and the revolutionaries moved haltingly toward negotiation. Yet *Exporting Democracy,* which gives over an entire chapter to "The Reagan Years" substantially ignores the presidency of Jimmy Carter and his human rights policy.

The accomplishments of the Carter administration in foreign policy have never received adequate recognition from U.S. scholars. In Latin America, however, democratic leaders saw in the Carter human rights policy the promise of a new relationship where our actions did not regularly give the lie to our words; a relationship which permitted Latin Americans to develop their own institutions in their own way, a relationship in which the United States helped Latin American states to move toward democracy. The leaders and peoples of Latin America have always had the will and the capacity to transform their countries into democratic nations. What they could not do is to achieve democracy over our opposition.

To its credit *Exporting Democracy* does ask the right questions and come up with the correct answers. We still have not learned there is no basis for democracy when we support governments that manipulate their peoples for the benefit of a tiny domestic elite. In the long run, those who share our common principles of freedom are the best guarantee of stability and harmony in the Americas.

THE SHAPE OF DISTANT THINGS

RESUSCITATION OF A HANGED MAN
Denis Johnson
Farrar, Straus, Giroux, $19.95, 257 pp.

Paul Elie

"There's really only one question," says Leonard English, the protagonist of Denis Johnson's fourth novel. "Did God really kill himself?" What his new friend wants to know is: "Did it feel sexy when you killed yourself? When you were hanging, did you come?" Overlook the dodgy theology; forget that these aren't the questions you generally ask on a first date in a coffee shop. Accept that *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* is willfully unorthodox, aggressively out of the ordinary. Though it probably will provoke many readers with its sensationalistic premises or its unyielding sexual politics, it is clearly a work of religious art—the odd contemporary novel that dares to yoke those words together and bear their double burden.

As its title implies, the novel is crammed full of morbid, paradoxical deaths and rebirths. The leading hanged man is English—a nervy, vaguely Catholic, Kansas-born drifter who knows himself as "one of those men in their thirties without much to recommend them" and who strikes others as "kind of always in the wrong lane." Having survived a bungled "try at self-murder" a few months back, he has come East to try, through work and love and the sheer act of starting over, to put his life together again. But the place he has come to is the "phony peninsula" of Provincetown, Massachusetts, in the off season. With its shuttered resorts, its fog and wind, and its populace of Vietnam vets and cross-dressing homosexuals and parishioners "lugging themselves like laundry toward the big doors of the church," the town has "every quality of the end of the line." Work, for English, is a pair of squalid jobs—as a jack-of-all-trades at a small radio station and as a detective for its owner, Ray Sands. Love comes to him at first sight, for a woman he spots in church—but Leanna Sousa, in one of the bursts of idiom that give the novel its truth and life, tells him she is "strictly P-town."

English's first task as a detective, it turns out, is to spy on Leanna's lover. As he trails her to a cabaret where people remake themselves as transvestites, as he eavesdrops on the lovers in bed by means of a mike-and-fishing-pole device, he thinks that his own attempt to remake himself in this seaside town has run aground: "He

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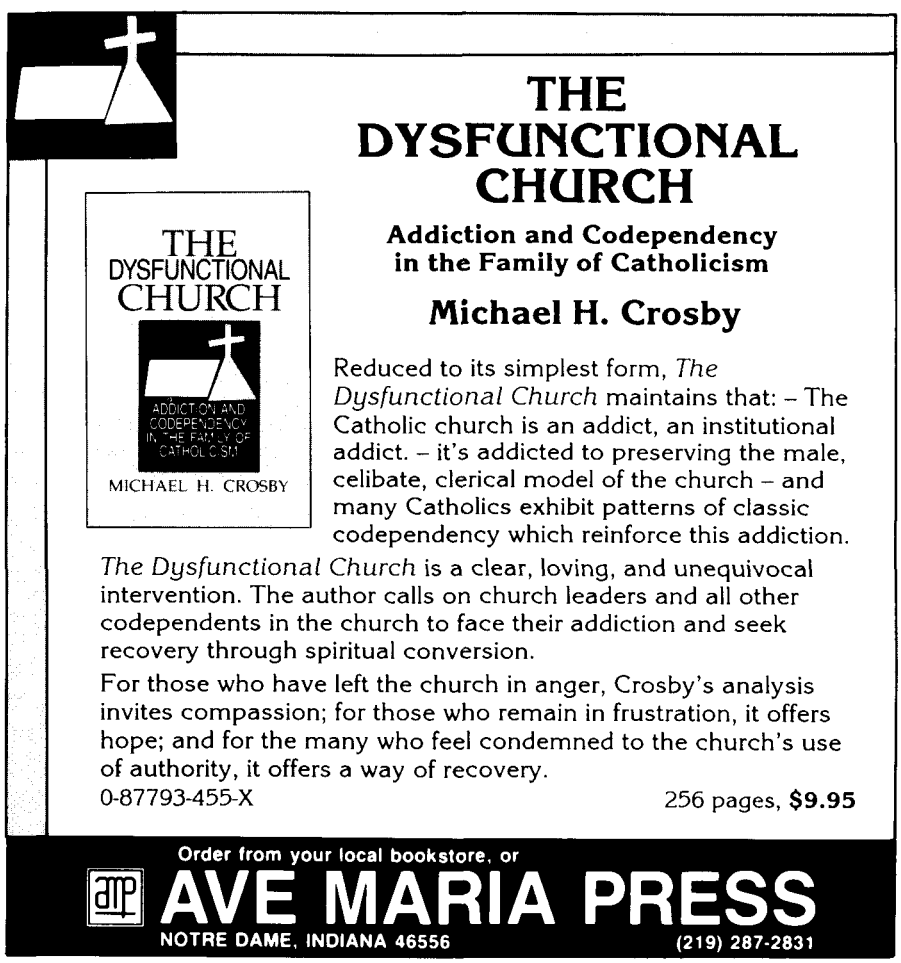
couldn't believe he was sitting in a tree with these items, which would be impossible to explain if anybody asked.... Hadn't his experience as his own unsuccessful hangman turned his life around? At what point had he gotten this corrupt?"

Soon enough, however, English's renewal forces itself on him. Or, rather, does he seek renewal where none exists? This unsettling quandary courses through the novel, established through a series of "reversals" (Johnson's word for *paradoxes*) that rule out any certain answer. Confessing to a priest soon after his arrival, English has mistakenly said, "I committed—I killed myself." What died in Kansas was his old self; now, he tells Leanna, he feels reborn, overwhelmed by "this crazy feeling that I'm being called." As such, he is alarmingly open to suggestion. When Leanna comically wonders if he is a "knight of faith," he accepts the vocation; when he hears, at church, about Simone Weil's death by starvation, he concludes that they are kindred spirits, haunted by "vague hints from the periphery." And when Sands assigns him to track down a missing person—a young artist named Twinbrook—English answers the call. "Don't ask me why. This whole thing has got me—I have to do something."

The search for God's will as a detective story: by now such a conceit is as stale and facile as a Chesterton aphorism, and it isn't made any fresher here by an allusion to Graham Greene or a declaration that ":the mystery is the Mystery." But even as he draws on the "divine investigation" conceit, Johnson toys with it, exploring the ways in which such a notion can make itself felt. His own approach owes less to crime-story conventions than to bold thematic parallels, masterfully strung along as English's quest grows ever nuttier and more absorbing. Twinbrook too is obsessed with dying and rising: he has made notes for a book about reviving the dead with electrical stimulation. Sands suffers a fatal heart attack, prompting English to ponder life after death: "he wondered if a human soul drift-ed along these corridors now, but he found—much to his alarm, to his great anguish—that he doubted it." Tired of gay life, Leanna takes him as her lover in order to enact her own romantic rebirth, which leads English to fear that "he might be living out some myth of seeking the goddess beyond the pale, entering the realm, being changed into one of its denizens, every footstep forward changing the shape of his soul...."

Such frankly interpretive writing risks being too masterful, just as English's twin pursuit of Twinbrook and Leanna at times seems so perfectly intended, so symbolically right on, as to be suspect. But wait: each symbolic note is paired with an anomaly, each eloquent bit of self-scrutiny shot through with madness. Not only is English a lover and an investigator—he is also a would-be assassin, intent on killing the local bishop, allegedly Sands's cohort in a group called the Truth Infantry. Inexplicable and pointless, this obsession throws the others into relief, suggesting that the Gandhis and the Hinckleys of this world have lots in common—that even the fiercest ideas of self, life, and vocation may be delusions of grandeur. Johnson digs into the paradox relentlessly, presenting English as now crazed, now called: "What if a person heeded all such inner rebop, would he be damned or saved? Isn't it a matter of faith marching after the delusion?...You start to know these things. You make out just the shape of it, the incredible size, on the horizon."

Making out the shape of distant things is the brief not only of madness, but also of art and religion. This *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* does in a way that honors all three. Few novels have rendered so well the zany nobility of life on the edge. And the edge of the novel is that of religious zeal, a double-edge of sanctity and insanity. Sure, depicting a religiously obsessed protagonist as a madman is an easy way for an author to get some safe distance on him and his God-fixation. But this latter is a way out that Johnson largely refuses to avail himself of. Far from standing apart from his character or inviting his audience to do so, Denis Johnson draws us so close to this hanged man that we're made to share his obsessions—to pose our religious questions, as he does, for an omniscient audience, to wonder, with him, what it is to be a fool for God.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THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET
Sandra Cisneros
Vintage Contemporaries, $9, 110 pp.

WOMAN HOLLERING CREEK AND OTHER STORIES
Sandra Cisneros
Random House, $18, 165 pp.

Ilan Stavans

Most educated readers of literature in this country can name a national author of Jewish origin, or black, Asian, or Italian heritage. But Hispanics have had a hard time making their narrative voice heard. With the Pulitzer Prize given to *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* by Oscar Hijuelos, and a National Book Award Nomination to *Chromos* by Felipe Alfau, 1990 may well have been one of the most eventful years in the history of Hispanic letters in the United States. These two authors have reminded many that not only can South American novelists deliver, but their conationals who immigrated north of the Rio Grande also have a voice.

Sandra Cisneros, born in Chicago in 1954, is being promoted by Random House, her new publisher, as the "new" Hispanic literary revelation. Her semiautobiographical novel *The House on Mango Street*, sometimes referred to as a collection of interconnected vignettes, was just reissued by Vintage Contemporaries, but it appeared almost ten years ago under the imprint of Arte Publico Press, a small press affiliated with the University of Houston that devotes its entire catalogue to minority writers of Latin American origin who write in English. Back then, it was reviewed in only three or four newspapers and journals, yet it acquired enough stature to be the recipient of the "Before Columbus American Book Award" (a title whose name, I confess, I have trouble understanding).

The House on Mango Street eventually became a hot item among publishers. Three reasons: First and foremost, it's written by a woman. And not any woman, but a Mexican-American, a voice hard to find in the professional literary arena. Second, its prose and images make use of folkloric, idiosyncratic expressions typical among Hispanics of Aztec origin; and third, it is a straightforward narrative. Esperanza Cordero, Cisneros's protagonist, is a sensitive young Mexican-American girl eager to climb the social ladder, not in terms of money and reputation but with regard to her personal education and self-esteem as an individual of an ethnic minority and as a female. Although the content is at times amateurish, the volume, a composite of evocative snapshots that manages to passionately recreate the milieu of the poor quarters of Chicago, is a pleasurable read.

After that, Cisneros wrote *My Wicked Wicked Ways*, a book of poetry. Published by Third Woman Press, the poems present a female voice discovering and discussing her individual and collective background and seeing herself as an independent woman, mother of nobody's children and wife only to her own shadow. Now comes *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, a few pieces of which appeared previously in journals and literary supplements. It's a mosaic of voices of Mexican-Americans who joke, love, hate, and comment on fame and sexuality. To call them "stories" may not always be accurate. They are verbal photographs, memorabilia, reminiscences of growing up in a Hispanic milieu. The author's intention, it seems, is to explain a trauma or to recreate a certain flavor of childhood or a long-lost feeling for a beloved or an acquaintance. At times one longs for longer, more sophisticated pieces, yet Cisneros dislikes length. Most of the entries are short: between one and fifteen pages. Her fiction is akin to delicate porcelain figures, fragile yet capable of carrying symbolic weight. Violence is inflicted on her characters by macho men or by people outside of their immediate geography. And sex is innocent but also violent.

"The Marlboro Man," for instance, is a dialogue between two girls about the ambiguous identity of the male lover of a third friend. "My Tocaya," again, is about a friendship between two girls, one of whom disappears and is presumed dead until she appears at the police station, to the surprise of everybody in town. "Woman Hollering Creek," the story that gives the title to the book, is about an abused wife who dreams, while constantly stumbling against the cruelties of her true companion, of having a handsome husband like the ones in the Spanish-speaking television soap operas.

Like Alice Munro's and Joyce Carol Oates's, Cisneros's texts are most convincing when they have a little girl as protagonist or narrator. Her style is candid, engaging, rich in language. Its major flaw, nevertheless, is that she bases most of her cast on stereotypes. The image of Hispanic men, for instance, is grim and depressing: while the guys are always abusive, alcoholic, and egotistical, the girls are naive, doll-like, occasionally in control yet obsessed with how nature transforms itself, how relationships deteriorate, and how people escape their responsibilities to meet a different, although not a better fate.

Is Cisneros a good writer? Is her prose worth reading? Certainly, although at times one has the feeling that she is exploiting literature as a militant activity to call attention to ethnicity, to cry against unfairness and injustice. But beneath this ideological

REVIEWERS

DAVID CASTRONOVO *is professor of English at Pace University of New York, and author of several books of criticism including* Edmund Wilson *(Fredrick Ungar).*

ROBERT E. WHITE, *U.S. ambassador to El Salvador and Paraguay during the Carter administration, is president of the Center for International Policy in Washington, D.C.*

PAUL ELIE *is writing a collection of short stories.*

ILAN STAVANS, *a Mexican novelist and critic, is the editor of the forthcoming* Tropical Synagogues: An Anthology of Jewish-Latin American Short Stories *(Holmes and Meier).*

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surface, the sensitive reader will also find a voice welcomely different and a prose both refreshing and often hypnotizing. And the fact that she has emerged as a Hispanic literary novelty is a sign that the fervor surrounding Hispanic letters in the U.S. may have an enduring life. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 498)

become most valuable to him. Not to get too melodramatic about it, but in this Garden of Gethsemani, could he have let the cup pass?

The second reaction was to wonder how sympathetically his article might be received if it recorded his decision to leave an institution smaller than the priesthood—the nuclear family, for example. How would it have sounded if he decided to leave a wife and children for another woman who helped him to realize more fully than ever "the very core of who I was...a man"?

The third reaction is related to the second. Church people have politely ignored the institutional impact of so many priests and religious leaving, often considering it a purely "personal" decision. Yet whatever the circumstances of individuals, the sheer number of those who left had an enormous social effect: nearly paralyzing some ministries offered by the church and numbing its vitality for attracting vocations in the future.

Perhaps, as some have said, we in the U.S. took for granted what was really an extraordinary situation. Alternatively, and ironically, as the church entered an era of emphasis on "community," perhaps its members retained a far too personal, even privatized, view of ministry that prevented them from saying to priests and religious thinking about leaving: "Please consider that our need for your service may be at least as great as the needs you seek to fulfill by leaving."

The failure of the church persuasively to make this appeal may signal that more than the difficulty of celibacy was at work. What I have in mind is a general resistance

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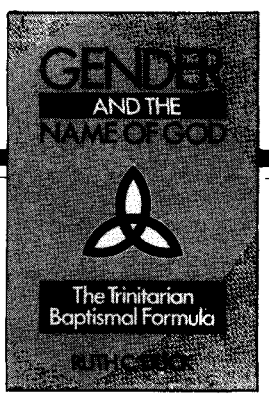
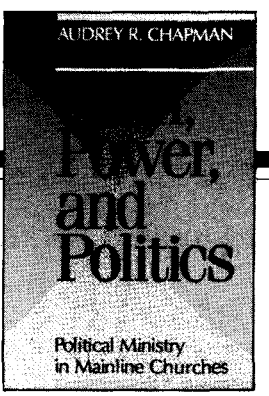


Gender God
Faith Power Politics



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to asking whether Christ really meant it when he said: "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son and daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10: 37-39).

(MSGR.) FRANCIS J. MANISCALCO

Alone is boring

Moultonboro, N.H.

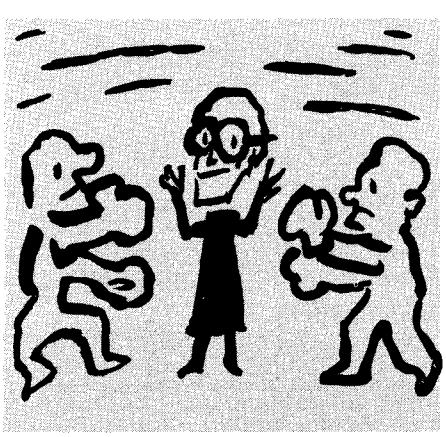
To the Editors: Lucretia B. Yaghjian, among others, seems to think there is something special about celibacy ["Enabled for the Kingdom," July 12]. I am now sixty years old and I've been a celibate all my life. As far as I am concerned, celibacy is boring. MATTHEW F. COSTELLO

Celebrating death

Syracuse, N.Y.

To the Editors: Contrary to your editorial [July 12], not everybody loves a parade. It doesn't take "the most dour of dissidents" to recognize that the New York parade was a celebration of death. Witnessing these rituals through the haze of red, white, and blue cotton candy, as does your editorial, conspires with and compounds the death-creating lies, hypocrisies, and deceptions that gave rise to and nourished the war. We cannot remove ourselves from our government's policies and enjoy a good time together when that celebration disguises and reinforces a powerful national tendency toward violence and aggression.

A far less hypocritical use of the millions of dollars we squandered on this Mother of All Monstrosities would be to erect a colossal golden idol of Mars. We could have the logos of the oil companies embossed on its shield, and perhaps images of fawning politicians and media lackeys cowering at its feet. He could be openly worshiped and glorified, and our society could "articulate its values and celebrate its life" without having to bury the truth under eighty-seven tons of confetti. Of course, the Prince of Peace would be as far removed from these proceedings as he was from your editorial.



Let us welcome home our troops with love and rejoice in their safe return. But let us not imply a validity to the carnage they have wreaked in our name.

PAUL COLLIER

Please, make nice

Birmingham, Ala.

To the Editors: The exchange between Richard Neuhaus and *Commonweal* [editorial, June 1, Correspondence, July 12] left me with a few questions: Where and when did the seminal duel between Neuhaus's great-grandfather and the *Commonweal* editor's great-grandfather take place? Which one died? Was the winner left blinded or just maimed? Have there been any truces in the subsequent ancestral feud?

Seriously, the tone of the *Centesimus annus* discussion was way too rough. Even when we disagree, we should play nice and get along.

Perhaps Neuhaus can write an essay explaining why his former church, after all, lacks apostolic authenticity despite the defense offered at the beginning of *The Catholic Moment*. And perhaps *Commonweal* can publish it.

Now hug and make up. Okay, at least shake hands. KEVIN DOYLE

Making nice

New York, N.Y.

To the Editors: I am truly sorry that my response to *Commonweal's* criticism of me upset the editors into a reaction almost twice as long as my letter [Correspondence, July 12]. Their suggestion, *inter alia,* that I presume to speak for the pope and attempt to "place *Commonweal* beyond the pale" of Catholicism is of course preposterous. I would not be surprised if the editors regretted it after they had a chance to cool down. My lighthearted reference to *Commonweal* as "a magazine that used to bill itself as Catholic" was based on misinformation. A friend who kindly went through back issues tells me that the word "Catholic" never did appear in the self-description on the masthead. I had been told that it used to some years ago. Please accept my apology, and my assurance that I am determined to remain among those who persist in viewing *Commonweal* as one of the treasures of American Catholic life. RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

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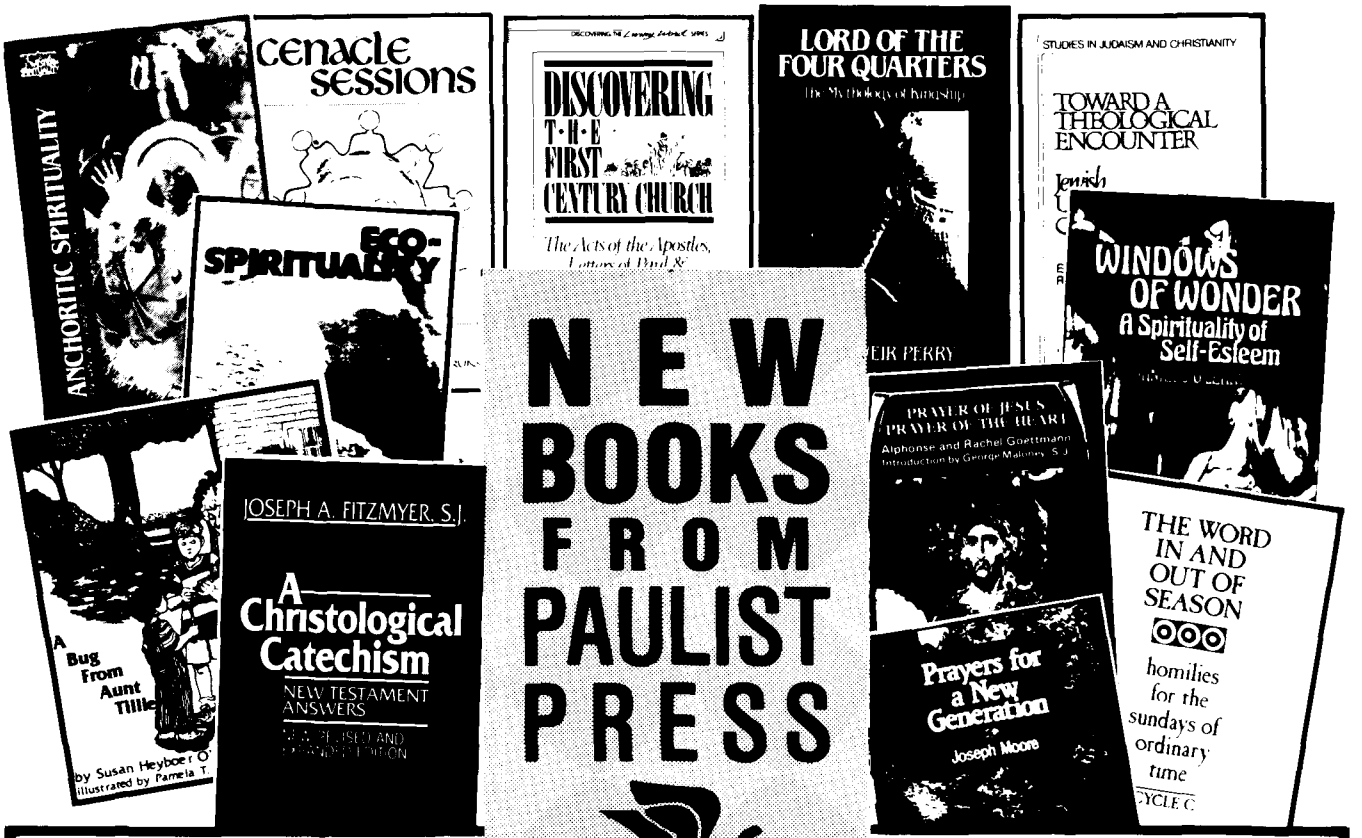
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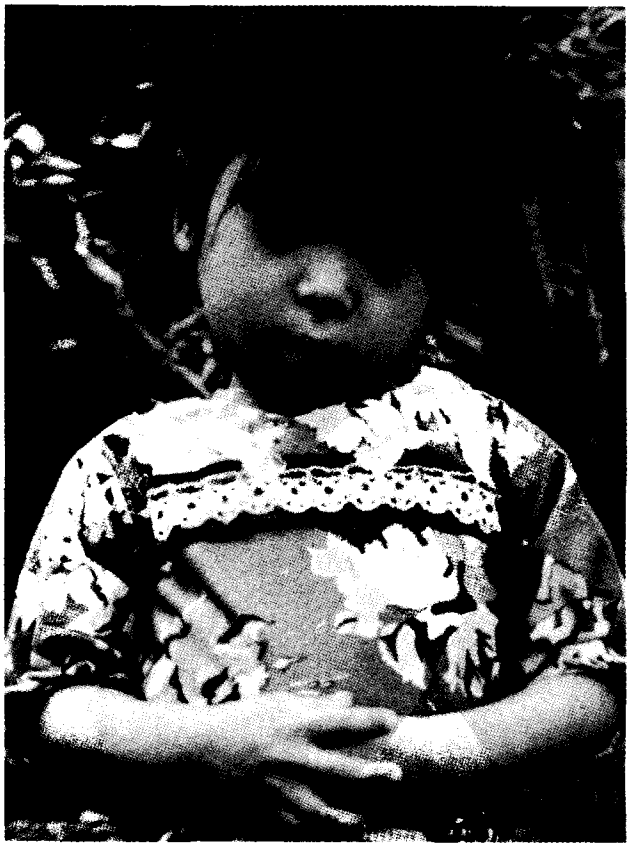

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